

CHOICE

NO MORE BULL!

These bars are dangerous

CHECKING OUT CHARITIES

Facts about your favourites

**VIDEO PROGRAMMING
MADE EASY**

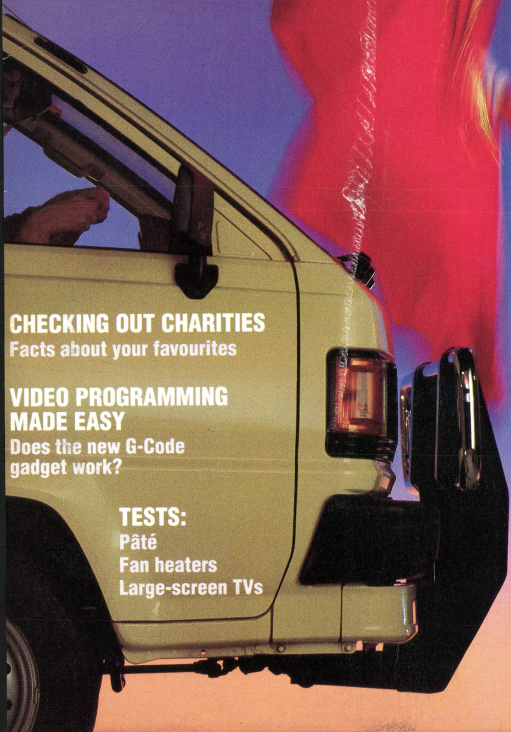
Does the new G-Code
gadget work?

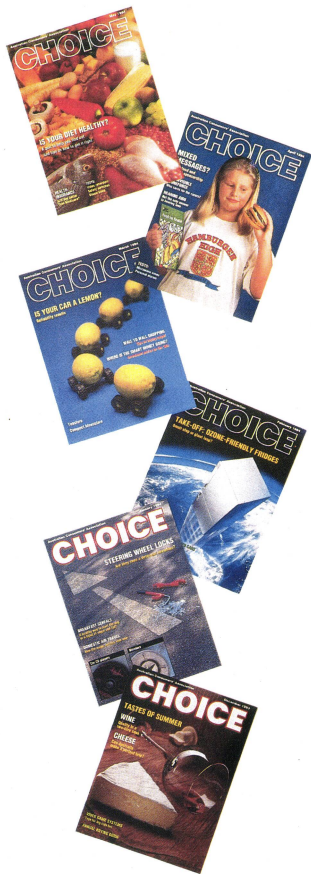
TESTS:

Pâté

Fan heaters

Large-screen TVs





Who are we?

CHOICE EXISTS TO HELP YOU make decisions. It might be a question of which washing machine or fridge to buy, or which insurance policy or bank account to choose. It might be a case of giving you enough information about areas such as health, food and nutrition that you feel confident your decisions are based on sound knowledge. The reason you can rely on CHOICE is that the only interests we represent are yours — the consumer's.

We're not a government department or agency, and we get no ongoing funding from any government. Neither do we receive any subsidies from industry, manufacturers, unions or any other group, and we don't take any advertisements in the magazine. CHOICE survives purely because people like you subscribe to it: over 85% of our income is from CHOICE subscriptions, and the rest from sales of our Consumer Bookshelf and CHOICE Books, plus some special technical services such as testing appliances for their energy efficiency labelling. So we're independent in the true sense of the word: beholden to no-one but the consumers we represent and who keep CHOICE alive.

The organisation behind CHOICE is the Australian Consumers' Association. This does more than just publish CHOICE: we represent consumers' interests at federal and state government levels as a balance to the influence of manufacturers and service providers. You can become a member of the Consumers' Association as well as a CHOICE subscriber if you wish. The small extra membership fee you pay demonstrates your commitment to the rights of consumers, and gives you a subscription to a second magazine — either *Consuming Interest*, our publication covering broader consumer policy, or *CHOICE Travel*.

Around 70 people work at CHOICE in roles ranging from processing your subscriptions to testing the appliances, answering consumer queries, writing the articles in CHOICE and *Consuming Interest*, and representing consumer interests in the public arena. We're here because you think you need us, you trust us and are prepared to pay to keep us going.

What do we do?

Ask most people and they'll tell you what CHOICE does is test products. We certainly do, and most visitors to our premises are surprised by the size and the state-of-the-art technology of our laboratories. We've moved far beyond the 'three men and a dog in a tin shed' image of our early days over 30 years ago. Much of our testing is based on the requirements of Australian or international standards, but we never forget the realities beyond the lab. Our tests aim to answer real consumer questions about the products people want to buy.

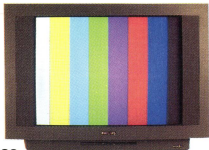
But products don't stop at TVs and washing machines. A bank account or an insurance policy is a product too, and we apply our expert skills to analysing things like these with a view to getting the best deal for consumers.

As well as lobbying industry and government about product safety, we have major policy areas in which we set specific goals to be achieved on behalf of consumers. At present these major areas are food, health and money. We've been working with the National Food Authority on various guidelines for manufacturers, have been maintaining a watch and a presence on behalf of consumers in the ongoing debates about Medicare and health insurance, and have fought for and won better consumer complaints handling procedures in the insurance industry.

We also pride ourselves on getting things right — if we didn't you wouldn't be able to trust our recommendations for long. If we do make a mistake we print a correction as soon as possible — but we work very hard to avoid this happening.



Cover photo: Kent Mears



Next issue

Vacuum cleaners, chainsaws, peanut butter, annual survey of supermarket prices, contact lenses, new rules for life insurance policies, cockroach killer update, income protection insurance — which are the best policies?

August, September, October

Tests: Mobile phones, strollers, exterior paint, washing machines, packaged frozen meals, pedestal fans, electric lawn trimmers, oven cleaners, solar-powered lamps.

Surveys: Public transport — which towns and cities around Australia offer the best service?; childcare — what do parents want, and what are they getting?; how satisfied are you with your bank's service?; the state of play in electricity and telephone services.

Features: Credit card options; information about food — cutting through the waffle; appliance servicing; new contraceptives; planning and buying a fitted kitchen; 'green' charities; funding your child's education; the problems with lead.

Features

6 These bars are bull

Bullbars can endanger pedestrians' lives and don't make the vehicle any safer for the occupants. What's more, they may well contravene Australian Design Rules for cars. Isn't it about time they were banned?

8 Charities

What do you know about your favourite charity? Without national regulations or even a full list of charities available, finding out the facts isn't easy. We look at the way they work in general and profile a few of the famous ones.

30 Selling your home

A look at the options you have when selling your home: going it alone or through a real estate agent? Direct sale or auction?

Tests

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Since our 1987 and '88 tests of pâtés, when we found several containing disease-causing bacteria, people have been asking us if it's safe to eat it yet. We're happy to say our latest tests mean we can answer with a qualified 'yes'.

36 Large-screen televisions

You need a big room to accommodate sets this size (with a 68 cm screen). And when you're paying close to \$2000 you're entitled to expect better performance than we found in a couple of the TVs we tested.

43 Fan heaters

Fan heaters with a thermostat are more expensive, but they ought to keep you more comfortable and save you having to keep turning the heater on and off. If the thermostat is ineffective, however — as we found with some of the models we tested — you might as well have saved your money.

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New telecommunications technology is set to radically alter the complexity and scope of a simple telephone call — and it could have far-reaching effects on your privacy rights too.

20 From our lab: the G-code programmer

The answer to the prayers of anyone who's ever turned purple with frustration when attempting to program their video recorder — but it does have a few compatibility problems with some brands of VCR.

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Greenpeace answers Norway; condom packaging defended; consumers against child labour.

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Test yourself with our regular consumer quiz.





CHOICE CUTS

Rechargeable batteries

SIZE ISN'T EVERYTHING

HANDS UP who thinks the big D size batteries they buy will last longer than their smaller C size cousins. It's a natural assumption for the non technically minded, but, as the old song says, "it ain't necessarily so". Take the case of

rechargeable nickel cadmium batteries (NiCads), for instance.

The most commonly used household battery sizes are AA, C and D, and in fact, as a general rule of thumb, these do represent steps up in capacity as well as physical size. Greg Boyce, a Qantas aircraft engineer who uses such batteries constantly in his work, sent us these differently sized examples (C and D) of NiCads, opened to reveal identical contents. They are the same battery cell packaged in different casings to enable them to fit the size requirements of particular appliances. In fact, both of them contain a smaller sub-C size cell and have metal spacers making up the difference. Both are rated at 1.2 Ah (amp hours) — meaning, fully charged, they should run, say, a torch drawing 200 mA of power for six hours before going flat.



Only the external size of these rechargeable batteries differs — they both have the same capacity when you uncover their insides.

Note that there is nothing necessarily wrong or deliberately deceptive about this. The two batteries sell for roughly the same amount — though in one retail outlet we checked the Ds were 30 cents dearer — and are comparable to other available batteries of like capacity. The amp hour ratings are given on the cases, albeit in the finer print.

Amp hour capacity is what you are really paying for when you buy a NiCad, and it's proportional to the hours of use delivered over the life of the battery. Consumers should be aware that the amp hour capacities of NiCad batteries on the market vary widely within the given size categories. The AAA, AA, C and D classes refer only to the size of the case; they have no strict relation to how long the battery will last, which is not the case with normal non-rechargeable

batteries. The shop we checked, for instance, had D size NiCads ranging in price from \$8.48 each up to \$16.95. In value for money terms (measured in amp hours per dollar), however, the dearest one, at 4 Ah, represents better value than the cheapest, at 1.2 Ah, by a factor of around 60%!

If you use this type of rechargeable battery you might like to take this into account when buying both the batteries and appliances that take them. Appliances made to take D size batteries might not run for very long at all with an underpowered sub-C in a D case. We'd like to see information about how much power and running time these products deliver displayed much more prominently on the cases, along with a clear explanation of the fact that the size classification is not necessarily related to how long they will last.

Alcohol labelling

HOW MANY DRINKS IN A KEG OF BEER?

FOR more than a decade now, various health and road safety campaigns have warned about the dangers of drink-driving. But to limit their alcohol intake, people need clear information about the amount of alcohol they're consuming, which is not always easy to find out.

Many campaigns about moderate drinking refer to a 'standard drink', which contains about 10 g of pure alcohol — that's roughly how much the average person can metabolise in an hour. Approximately this amount is in 285 mL of full-strength (5% alcohol) beer, 375 mL (a can) of low-alcohol (3%) beer, 100 mL of (12%) wine, 60 mL of (20%) sherry or fortified wine, or 30 mL (a shot) of (40%) spirits.

Most people will be familiar with these rough guides, but how useful are these measurements, considering that alcohol content differs between many types of beer, wine and spirits, and glasses aren't standardised?

With a complex equation, you

can calculate the number of standard drinks in a large bottle of beer or a cask of wine, but judge for yourself how many people would do it: Multiply the volume of the container by the percentage of alcohol, for example 5% (which will give you the millilitres of alcohol); then multiply by 0.79 (to convert millilitres to grams); then divide by 10 and round to the nearest half standard drink. "Not an easy task at the best of times, let alone if you've been drinking!" says Jillian Woolmer, the Executive Officer of the Alcohol Advisory Council of WA.

The Council, together with various other health, research and consumer bodies (including the Consumers' Association) has for four years been trying to get a proposal through the bureaucracy to require alcohol manufacturers to indicate on their products how many standard drinks they contain. But late in March this year, state and federal health ministers postponed making a decision, despite support from the National

Food Authority and even from the wine industry. "The issue is not dead, just placed back on the bureaucratic merry-go-round," says Ms Woolmer.

The standard drink labelling proposal not only aims at reducing the number of road fatalities but is part of a broad health education campaign to increase awareness — in particular among young people — of the health and social problems caused by drinking too much alcohol.

If you support the idea of standard drink labelling, write to the health minister in your state and

urge him or her to endorse the proposal. At the time of writing, the outcome of a further meeting planned for late in May was not yet known. Should the ministers approve the recommendation at that meeting, congratulate them on their initiative.



Would you know how many standard drinks there are in this bottle of beer, or in the glass?



CHILD SAFETY BEGINS AT HOME

TO MOST children the home is a place of safety and comfort, but in fact about two thirds of the reported injuries to children under five years old happen in their own homes. Most of these accidents are preventable with a little foresight and thought about the potential dangers. To help parents make their homes a safe environment the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia (CAPFA) is promoting a 30-page booklet entitled *A Parents' Guide to Kidsafe Homes*, which gives a swag of hints and tips on child accident prevention.

The colourful booklet covers areas such as poisons, electrocution, burns and scalds, etc, and shows how to minimise the risks to chil-

dren by adopting some simple strategies. Each section begins with a short summary of the potential problems and goes on to give a list of steps you can take to make your home 'kidsafe', as well as some useful safety hints. The booklet ends with a home safety checklist that lets you go through each room in your house and see whether you need to take some action.

The booklet costs \$5 and can be found at Amcal chemists or you can order it on 0055 12921. For more information on this booklet or other child safety issues you can contact the CAPFA 'Kidsafe' office in your state or territory. The phone numbers are listed in our *Choice Kidsafe index* below.

New titles

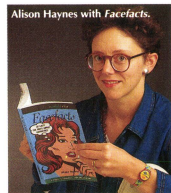
BOOK LOVERS TAKE NOTE

IF YOU WANT to take a closer look at the growing number of CHOICE Books, the Consumers' Association's own series of titles, why not come and leaf through them and meet our staff at the Australian Book Fair at the Sydney Exhibition Centre, halls 4 and 5, Darling Harbour. Entrance is free to the public on June 25 and 26.

Among the titles we'll be selling will be — hot off the press — *In Transition, A Guide to Menopause*, by Dr Deborah Saltman. Other recent additions to the portfolio include *Put It In Writing: 77 Letters That Get Results* by Margaret White and *Facefacts: A Guide to Cosmetics, Skin and Hair Care* by CHOICE magazine journalist, Alison Haynes.

There will be well over 100 publishers represented at the fair — from independent outfits like Envirobook, Five Mile Press and Kangaroo Press to international names such as Penguin, Random House and Harper Collins.

Alison Haynes will help staff the CHOICE stand and sign copies of *Facefacts*. She'll also be speaking on an author panel entitled *The Body Beautiful*, alongside Libby Harkness, author of *Skin Deep* — a guide to cosmetic surgery, and Nook Taylor-Vieira, whose *Exposing the Make-Up Myth* was released last year. You can hear the panel at 11 am on Sunday, June 26, at stage 1, hall 5.



Alison Haynes with *Facefacts*.

A SERIOUS HANGOVER

In CHOICE's Autumn Consumer Bookshelf catalogue, we included the publication *Making wine at home* by Gloria Oxford. This book has since been recalled by its publisher. See *recalls and bans* on page 47 for more details.

If you or anyone you know has bought this book elsewhere, it should be returned immediately to where you bought it from for a full refund. Harper Collins has issued a product recall in the press and to booksellers.

The problem is an error on page 46. A section on curbing off-flavours calls for 400 grams of copper sulphate to be dissolved in water and added to your wine. This amount is incorrect (far too high) and would produce a highly toxic brew.

About two thirds of reported injuries to children under five happen in the home. This new booklet gives tips on making it a safer place.



CHOICE KIDSAFE INDEX

Here's a ready index (January 1990 to June 1994) of CHOICE articles, books, *Choice Cuts*, the *Green Page* and other small pieces (the latter three indicated by *) which relate to children and their care. We've compiled it in support of National Kidsafe Day (June 17, 1994), organised by the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia. We hope you find it useful.

Accident prevention

May 90, Dec 90, Jul 91*

Additives in food

Feb 91, Oct 92*

Advertising, TV

Jun 90, Oct 90, Dec 90*

Alcohol in kids' medicines

Aug 93*

Allergies

Nov 92

Aluminium in canned drinks

Aug 92*

Aluminium in the diet

Jan 92, Apr 92*

Aluminium in infant formula

Nov 90

Arthritis

Oct 92

Asthma management

Nov 91*, May 93

Baby exerciser

Dec 93*

Baby Play Gym

Jul 91

Baby walkers

Nov 93*

Barbecues, kettle

Mar 92*, Jan 93

Batteries, 'AA'

Jun 90

Bicycle helmets

Oct 90*, May 91, Oct 92

Bunk beds

Jan 92, Oct 92*

Carob

Jun 90*

Camping tables and chairs

Aug 90

Child car restraints

Mar 93*, Apr 93, Apr 94*

Childproof caps

Nov 90*

Children in car accidents

Sep 93*

Children's party food

Dec 90, Apr 91*

Child's umbrella

Sep 90

CHOICE Guide to Baby Products

Consumer Bookshelf

Clothes labelling

Apr 93

Cots

Mar 91,

Jun 91*, Jul 91*, Aug 91*, Jan 94*

Cot bumpers

May 90

Cough medicines

Jan 90*, Jul 90

Cradles, unsafe

Dec 92*

Dogs that bite

Aug 91

'Fast' food

Jul 90, Apr 94

Fire safety

Feb 94*

Frozen fish fingers

Feb 92

Fruit substitutes for kids

Sep 91*, Mar 93

High chairs

Jan 90, Mar 90, Jul 93

Hinge dangers

May 90

Home emergencies

Mar 92

Immunisation

Aug 90

In-line skates

Dec 92

Ipecac syrup

Dec 90*

Lambkins

Nov 91*

Lead in canned foods

Jan 93*

Lollies, Push Pops

Nov 92*

Nappies

Feb 90*,

Sep 91*, Mar 92*, Nov 93

Natural oils — toddlers at risk

Jul 91*

Packaged meals for kids

Feb 93

Pen tops

Apr 94*

Playground equipment accidents

Feb 92

Pollution in the home

Jan 93

Pool fences

Dec 91*, Dec 92

Radiant heaters

May 91

'Safety' tap

May 90

Scene sets

May 91*

Shopping trolley safety

Mar 92*

Smoke detectors

Feb 90

Socks can cause gangrene

Mar 90*

Soy drinks

Apr 92

Strollers

Nov 91, Feb 92*

Sugar in the diet

Apr 92

Sugar in fruit juices

Jan 90*

Sun protection

Dec 90, Apr 91*, Jan 92*, Jan 93

Sunglasses

Jan 91*, May 91*, Feb 92*

Swimming caps

Dec 93*

Television viewing

Dec 93*

Toy safety

Nov 91

Toy instructions

Aug 92*

Water filters

Feb 93, Apr 93, May 93*, Sep 93

To find out more about Kidsafe Day you can contact the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia office in your state or territory on the following numbers:

- ACT: (06) 290 2242
- NT: (02) 633 0805
- NSW: (089) 892 783
- Queensland: (07) 854 1829
- SA: (08) 204 6318
- Tasmania: (002) 241 124
- Victoria: (03) 670 1319
- WA: (09) 340 8509



DRIVELINES

THESE BARS ARE BULL

Bullbars add little, if anything, to the safety of a car's occupants but can be lethal to pedestrians.

IT WAS COMING UP TO MIDDAY on a September morning in 1992. Ernest Bowd had just finished a little shopping and was crossing Lower Heidelberg Road in the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg when he was struck by a Toyota Tarago van. The van wasn't travelling particularly fast. In fact it was estimated to be doing less than 40 kph when it hit Mr Bowd, but this was enough to put him in hospital with fractured ribs and major pelvic injuries. He was conscious and alert when he was admitted to hospital, but two days later Ernest Bowd died as a result of a brain haemorrhage from a previously undetected fractured skull sustained in the accident.

The death of Mr Bowd is tragedy enough, but made even sadder by the fact that he may well have been alive today if the van that struck him had not been fitted with a bullbar. At the inquest into the death, the coroner heard evidence

from several experts concerning the dangers of bullbars, and in his finding on the death of Mr Bowd had scathing criticism of the fitting of bullbars to cars and vans.

"It appears the primary reason for the fitting of these devices is the protection of vehicle bodywork from minor damage such as is likely to occur in parking collisions," he said.

"It is clear on the evidence before me, however, the attachment of a bullbar to the front of passenger cars and vans negates the positive result of vehicle frontal design for pedestrian safety that is incorporated in modern vehicles, thereby resulting in a significantly higher impact severity to the unprotected road user."

What if ...?

In the course of the inquest the coroner heard evidence from Dr Josef A Tomas, Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Dr Tomas used sophisti-

cated computer modelling to simulate the conditions of Mr Bowd's accident and looked at what would have happened if the van had not been fitted with a bullbar. In a summary of the findings of his investigations Dr Tomas concluded that, "Without the bullbar, tolerable head and pelvic injuries were likely. With the bullbar fitted, the collision was virtually unsurvivable because of severe head and pelvic injuries."

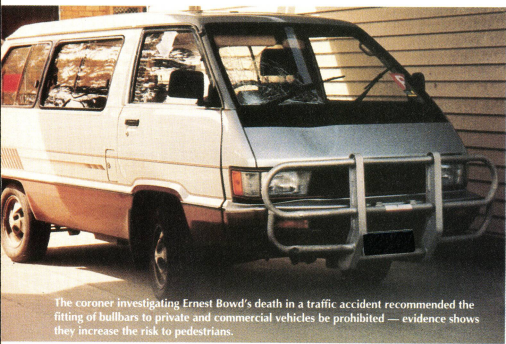
The simulation predicted injuries would be more severe because of the rigidity and 'aggressive' shape of the bullbar, causing the head and pelvic regions to be accelerated far more than they otherwise might have, and the head to be 'whipped' around to impact on the lower edge of the windscreen instead of the less rigid centre.

In a general investigation of collisions between pedestrians and 'forward control vehicles' such as the Tarago van, Dr Tomas concluded that, "Regardless of the specific [bullbar] design, severe head and pelvic injuries seem to be an inevitable consequence in a pedestrian collision in which a bullbar is fitted."

Car occupant safety

Bullbars on cars and vans appear to be a uniquely Australian phenomenon. Their traditional role of preventing damage to the fronts of cars in collisions with animals in rural areas has largely been upstaged by their prevalence on our city streets, particularly on vans like the one that hit Mr Bowd.

One standard argument for having bullbars on vans is that it supposedly protects the occupants during frontal collisions. According to a study in 1986 by the Traffic Authority of NSW, the protection offered by bullbars is negligible and there is evidence to suggest that in some instances they can actually make an accident worse by redirecting the crash forces so as to more severely injure the occupants. In the report it was stated



The coroner investigating Ernest Bowd's death in a traffic accident recommended the fitting of bullbars to private and commercial vehicles be prohibited — evidence shows they increase the risk to pedestrians.

that, "... the general contribution of bullbars to protection was negligible. The general observation was that bullbars bend or break at their mountings, so the main uprights fold back onto the front panels and the corner wings fold into the corner panels."

The report goes on to conclude, "Contrary to the probable expectations of van owners, bullbars generally served no beneficial purpose. Lightly constructed ones were of no consequence. Heavily constructed ones may have helped direct crash forces into structural members in the fronts of vans and may have helped reduce foot-well intrusion, but on the other hand may have increased intrusion at dash level, possibly contributing to the more serious injuries that occurred because of dashboard intrusion. The study concluded that bullbars would not reduce serious injuries or death."

Australian Design Rules

During the course of the inquest on Mr Bowd an apparent inconsistency emerged between the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) and the Victorian Road Safety Act. It is stated in ADR 42.9.1 that, "No vehicle shall be equipped with any object or fitting, not technically essential, which protrudes from any part of the vehicle so that it is likely to increase the risk of bodily injury to any person". The Road Safety Act, on the other hand, contains a clause which specifically lists bullbars as an approved modification. If we accept the evidence, as the coroner did, that bullbars increase the risk to pedestrians, then fitting them contravenes the current ADRs.

Coroner's recommendation

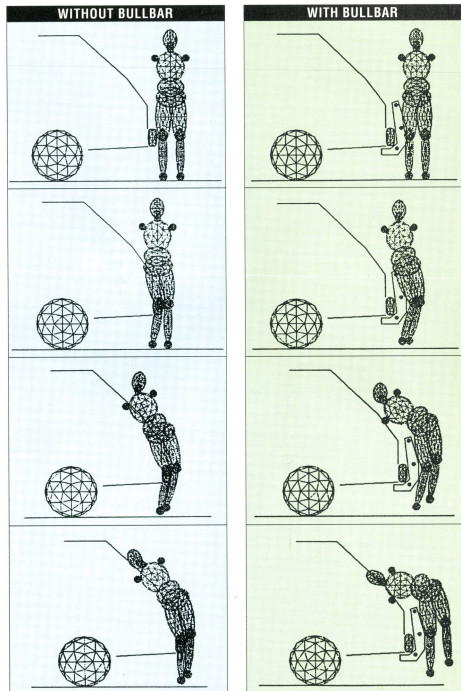
In his findings into the death of Ernest Bowd the coroner made the following statement: "It is recommended that legislative provisions be implemented to ensure that the intended meaning of Australian Design Rule 42.9.1 is fulfilled, which I am satisfied would then prohibit the fitting of bullbars to private and commercial vehicles."

David Wright, executive director of the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association, feels that a ban is not appropriate. He rejects the claim that current bullbar designs are inherently unsafe to pedestrians, but does admit that a bullbar must be tailored to a vehicle and properly fitted. He says more investigation needs to be done and claims that the bullbar industry is currently looking into the issue of bullbar safety with the aim of developing a code of practice. Given the evidence presented to the inquest, however, we support the coroner's call

for the enforcement of the current ADRs.

Regardless of the state of the legislation it is clear that people need to be educated to the dangers bullbars pose. The sense of protection and security instilled by the fitting of bullbars to cars and vans, particularly in towns and cities, is questionable, and vehicle owners should be made aware that they could be putting themselves and others at risk by fitting them. Car designers have made great strides in increasing the safety of

vehicles for both occupants and pedestrians and the Australian Design Rules maintain and promote these gains. Adding a bullbar to the front of a car or van can negate these design safety benefits. The idea that fitting a bullbar will increase this security is akin to putting up an umbrella during an avalanche. Worse than this, it can increase the likelihood that a car or van can act as a lethal projectile and pose an unnecessary risk to pedestrians. □



A computer simulation (by Dr Josef Tomas of the Vehicle Safety Group at RMIT): without a bullbar the body 'folds' itself around the front of the van. With a bullbar fitted the head and pelvic acceleration is greater and the head hits the windscreen closer to the bottom edge, potentially increasing the severity of the injuries received.

Charities



Ever increasing numbers of charities are vying for public support.

Donors want to know whether these organisations are doing what they say they do — and how well they're doing it. We asked nine of the larger, nationally well-known charities for information, but found that without standardised regulations for the non-profit sector, their financial data is virtually impossible to compare.

W *F THE GOVERNMENT allocated taxes where they are most needed, it is hard to believe that constant public collections should be needed. The revenue from pokies, Tatts-lotto, etc, is enormous and supposed to go towards such needs. So why are we constantly begging?*", asks one of our subscribers. In Australia, non-profit organisations provide more than half of all welfare services, among them emergency relief — food, accommodation and material aid — for people in crises and various support services for people in need.

Statistics about the size of the non-

government welfare sector are hard to obtain: there's neither a consolidated list of charities registered nationwide, nor a uniform definition of 'charitable organisation' in relevant federal and state legislation. In NSW alone, an estimated 12 500 institutions have charitable status. However, this figure includes non-profit, public-benefit organisations most people would perhaps not immediately think of as charities, such as sporting and social clubs, childcare centres, schools and churches. On the non-government community welfare front (excluding health), in 1990 the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated about 10 000 such organisations in Australia employing about 75 000 workers.

What you can do: volunteering ...

Almost all non-profit organisations rely on volunteer labour, either exclusively or in addition to paid staff. Volunteers are needed at all levels of the organisation: on the board of directors to oversee op-

erations, to provide services, organise fund-raising events and work on the day, or staff shops, market stalls and offices. A 1982 study estimated the number of volunteers in non-government welfare organisations as between 750 000 and 1.4 million. At the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne, for example, 1157 supporters each contributed between 260 and 650 hours of voluntary work during the last financial year — to a conservatively estimated value in economic terms of more than \$6 million.

So if you would like to assist but are strapped for money yourself, consider volunteering. Your offer of time — either regularly or on occasion — will undoubtedly be appreciated. "I have never monetarily donated to a charity for which I have worked — they've got me, what more do they want?" And what better way to convince yourself of the value of the work you're supporting than by helping and checking it out at the same time? However, if your employment or commitments leave no spare

Thanks

Thanks to all subscribers who responded to our request for information. Your thoughts helped us get a general picture of the level of support local charities enjoy in Australia. Direct quotations from readers' letters are in *italics* throughout the article.

time for volunteer work, you can still support a charity with donations of money or goods.

... donating

"I look at charities that help people in general need and who aren't getting much help elsewhere and rely heavily on donations." People donate for a variety of reasons: some simply want to help others in need or assist in a socially useful activity; others, who have been at the receiving end of charitable assistance in the past, now want to reciprocate. Some support charities that finance research or assist people afflicted with certain diseases, while others like the opportunity of winning a prize in return for a donation. Some just do it because it makes them feel good.

Whatever the motivation for giving, people who support a charity generally believe in its philosophy — be that humanitarian, religious or political, or any combination thereof — and trust it to put their money to good use. We received many letters praising the good work of various charitable organisations, but many respondents also displayed a degree of scepticism, distrust or ignorance: *"I like to know what they are trying to achieve, how their donated money is managed, any government checks and balances to ensure money reaches the recipient."*

To check a charity's 'authenticity' is not an easy task. Judging from your responses, many people who used to give small donations to numerous appeals and organisations in the past are now donating more substantial amounts to one or a few charities whom they trust — or of whose 'worthiness' they have convinced themselves. If you want to find out whether a charity is doing what it says it does when you're approached for a donation at home or in the street, ask for the collector's identification and a receipt, which should display a registration, ACN or tax deductibility number. All these can give you some indication of the organisation's status. But it's not a foolproof test: there may still be some very worthy organisations which neither have to be registered nor have tax deductibility status.

Regulation of charities

In Australia charities are regulated at federal, state and local government levels. Apart from Tasmania and the two territories, all states have some form of legislation for the registration of charities or appeals. In most states, larger charities which already have a legal identity — such as incorporations limited by

guarantee — now have their fund-raising appeals and collections registered rather than their organisations. The exemptions from the legislation and the requirements for registration vary from state to state, which can make it rather difficult for some national organisations to keep administration costs to a minimum.

For example, many church-sponsored organisations are exempt from the NSW fund-raising legislation, but donations to these charities would most likely be tax-deductible. To qualify for tax deductibility status, an organisation has to provide material aid to individual people; a neighbourhood centre or advocacy service would therefore not qualify, says Associate Professor Mark Lyons, the Director of the Centre for Australian Community Organisation and Management

subscribers recently questioned the appointment of a highly paid executive by a large charity he regularly supported. As the answer he received did not satisfy his concerns, he'll direct his future donations elsewhere.

... and a cause for indignation

Any organisation that solicits funds should not only be accountable to its donors but interested in keeping them informed of projects and developments on a regular basis. Some people appreciate this service: *"I receive brochures and flyers throughout the year, giving me the satisfaction that I know where the money is being spent and what work they do for sick, injured and isolated people."*

However, the majority of people who wrote to us find the amount of mail from

"A charity by definition is not trying to get a bigger return on any investment, it's not about boosting its profit at all costs. It's about spending money and trying to spend a little less each year than it's able to gain in revenue."

at the University of Technology, Sydney. As he sees it, you can't rely on any government authority to give you a firm assurance as to the 'authenticity' or 'status' of a charity: some of the biggest charitable organisations are exempted from the regulations; the definition of tax deductibility in the tax act is too limited; and monitoring compliance with the regulations is not always given top priority.

Annual reports: a source of information...

"I have never seen any annual reports or audits of charities and I sometimes wonder how efficient and economical they are." If you're considering becoming a large-scale donor or pledging a regular donation to a charity and would like to find out more about it, try to obtain any information material — such as brochures, a mission statement, a newsletter — and a copy of the organisation's annual report. Most reports include audited financial statements. Bear in mind, though, that some organisations will not be able to supply consolidated reports (the results from all the state organisations collected together) with national figures. But more about figures later.

If you still have questions after you've read the report, talk to the organisation's chief executive officer or any other person who can give you answers. Or put your questions in writing. One of our

charities cluttering their letterboxes highly annoying, especially *"the subtle, insidious pressure to give more"*. As one subscriber put it: *"In the last 10 months I have received a total of nine items: three glossy magazines and six letters ... I am highly offended to see my modest gift returned 'to the converted'."* Or another: *"To reduce the waste of paper and cost to the charity, I wrote to all assuring them of my continued support and asking them to cease sending appeals. In some cases it took two and even three such letters — and a threat to cease donations — before results were achieved."*

Some organisations are obviously aware of their donors' concerns about resource management and financial accountability. The Brotherhood of St Laurence, for example, acknowledges those who contributed to the production of the annual report (which cost them \$1.90 per copy), lists a telephone number for readers who want to obtain further copies and says it would appreciate a small donation to cover costs. The Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia and some other organisations print on recycled paper.

According to Jeremy Hobbs, the Executive Director of Community Aid Abroad (now merged with Freedom from Hunger), people like giving, but paradoxically, they don't give unless they're asked. And direct marketing — if done properly — is by far the cheapest



What happens to donated clothing?

Clothes you no longer need or like can make a difference to a person in need. The Smith Family distributes the best of all donated clothing in its welfare centres or clothing depots. What's not needed there is sold in a few shops in the Sydney region.

In NSW, the St Vincent de Paul Society runs 250 Centres of Charity. The majority have so-called 'family rooms', which stock donated clothing for distribution to people in need. Most of the centres also have a retail outlet, mainly aimed at low-income families, where clothes are sold. The surplus is sent to developing countries, especially in the South Pacific region.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence distributes free clothing, household goods and basic furniture to people in need through its material aid service. For example, the Geelong Service, the Big Bin, distributed goods to over 10 000 low-income people last year.

Even clothes that can't be given away or sold can still be put to good use. Most organisations will sell them for rag making.

way of asking. "If people expect low fund-raising costs, then they need to be prepared to receive direct mail," he says.

We are pleased to report that all the charities we surveyed assured us that donors who want to be taken off mailing lists, want to receive certain items only or receive mail-outs less frequently, only have to let them know (in writing, preferably) and their requests will be honoured. Most of the organisations say they regularly give donors the opportunity to indicate what they wish to receive.

Making sense of figures

Apart from telling you what projects an organisation supports, its annual report should also give you an indication of how its money is spent. Charities generally receive their income from various sources: donations and fund-raising appeals, trusts, bequests and legacies, volunteer work, investments, business enterprises, fees for service and government grants. All but one of the charities we approached (their profiles start opposite) filled in our survey form and listed their latest yearly income. (We requested information from the RSPCA, but were told — four weeks after we posted our request and after repeated telephone inquiries — it was unable to meet our deadline.) Most also stated their yearly expenditure and did their best to explain the figures in our follow-up calls, but to list them fairly in their profile — so that

readers can compare — proved to be an impossible task, as no uniform accounting standards apply to charities across the country.

Some examples:

- Some charities also operate commercial activities and include net income of these ventures in their financial statements, while others keep them separate; others again use the profits to finance their fund-raising and administration costs.

- Some list their net fund-raising income, from which fund-raising expenses have been deducted; others include wages and related expenses for service providers in welfare expenses.

While all these accounting procedures are quite acceptable, some make for better PR than others and can hide the fact that fund-raising generally costs money. There are many more reasons why you shouldn't judge a charity purely by the expenses it lists.

- New charitable organisations will generally have to spend more on fund-raising than well-established ones, as it costs more to establish new donors.

- If an organisation has a three-year fund-raising cycle, for example, its costs in the first year of the cycle will probably be much higher than in the next or previous year.

- Even the type of assistance — and beneficiary — plays a part in an organisation's fund-raising costs, as some causes appeal more to donors than others (people

tend generally to be more inclined to give for, say, earthquake survivors or abused children than for homeless, alcohol-dependent men).

"It would be good to have them listed on a 'Charity Stock Exchange'," suggested one reader. Charities are accountable to their donors (and to volunteers, government and service recipients as well), but they cannot be judged on 'financial performance' alone, like a private business enterprise. "A charity by definition is not trying to get a bigger return on any investment, it's not about boosting its profit at all costs," says Professor Lyons. "It's about spending money and trying to spend a little less each year than it's able to gain in revenue." Its objectives are humanitarian and its service is needs-driven and compassionate; what it achieves with the money spent cannot be measured in economic terms.

Many of the issues raised above are currently being examined by an Industry Commission Inquiry into Charitable Organisations, established in December last year to look into community and welfare services, except for those in the non-government education and health sectors. Size, efficiency and effectiveness of this non-profit sector, funding, accountability and government regulation are key issues to be addressed. We'll keep you informed when the report is released.



Amnesty International Australia

Philosophy and main activities:

"Amnesty International is a worldwide voluntary movement that works to prevent some of the gravest human rights violations by governments." Its main campaigning focus is "to free all prisoners of conscience, ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners, abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel treatment of prisoners, and end extrajudicial executions and 'disappearances' ". The organisation is impartial and independent and "does not support or oppose any government, political system or the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect".

Main beneficiaries: Victims of human rights violations. Amnesty Australia does not work on cases of human rights abuse in Australia, but other sections of Amnesty do. This is to ensure impartiality, and in some countries to protect Amnesty workers. However, in Australia the organisation is able to campaign against the death penalty or its introduction.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 are tax-deductible. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs and information leaflets.

Feedback to donors: Members receive 11 newsletters, four appeal letters, two catalogues per year and information pertinent to their state. (Amnesty membership costs \$40 for a single person, \$65 for a household or \$15 concession.) Donors receive five appeal letters, either two or four newsletters, action cards and two catalogues.

Income in 1993: \$3.6 million

Government funding in 1993: None. No funds are sought or accepted from governments.

Expenditure breakdown 1993:

Campaigning: 39%

Fund-raising and promotion: 39%

Administration: 22%

In 1993, \$753 168 raised locally was sent to Amnesty's international parent organisation.

Audited accounts are publicly available.



Australian Red Cross

Philosophy and main activities:

The Australian Red Cross works to "prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it is found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, to work for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of health and social welfare". Its main activities include a blood transfusion service, health and safety education, health and community services, disaster relief, international aid, tracing and uniting families separated by armed conflict and dissemination of international humanitarian law. The Australian Red Cross is affiliated with the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Main beneficiaries: Vulnerable members of the community, refugees, and victims of armed conflict.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 are tax-deductible and donors can identify preferred projects for their donations. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs and are encouraged to give out the organisation's address and/or telephone number so people can check their credentials.

Feedback to donors: Annual report, regular newsletters, project and situation reports.

Income in 1992/93: \$63.4 million (plus an additional \$84.7 million for Blood Transfusion Service (BTS), which is almost wholly government-funded).

Government funding in 1992/93: 53% of total income (excluding BTS)

Total expenditure breakdown 1992/93

(excluding BTS):

National services: 63.5%

Fund-raising, marketing and merchandising: 12.7%

International Red Cross and international relief activities: 11.2%

Organisational and promotional activities: 7.0%

Administration: 5.6%

Expenditure breakdown within national services (excluding BTS):

Health and community services: 73.4%

Health and safety education program: 10.3%

Regional support and services: 8.5%

Disaster services, Australian disaster relief and tracing: 4.2%

Youth services and activities: 2.9%

Dissemination of international humanitarian law: 0.7%

Audited accounts are publicly available.

BROTHERHOOD

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Philosophy and main activities:

The motto of the Brotherhood of St Laurence is 'adding justice to care'. The organisation works "for the well-being of the poorest members of the Australian community". Through research and social action, the organisation "is an advocate for social justice and offers direct assistance to people in need by providing employment programs, care for the aged and infirm, family support services and shelter for the displaced in our community". The organisation is affiliated with the Anglican diocese of Melbourne.

Main beneficiaries: People who are disadvantaged, including frail elderly or homeless people, low-income families and unemployed people.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 to the organisation's various projects are tax-deductible. Donors can identify preferred projects for their donations.

Feedback to donors: Annual report, quarterly newsletter *Action*, other research and general information on request, 'thank you' letter and receipt for a donation.

Income in 1992/93: \$23.1 million

Government funding in 1992/93: 49.1% of total income

Total expenditure breakdown 1992/93:

Services, aid and grants: 91.1%

Social policy and research: 4.1%

Corporate expenses: 4.8%

1992/93 saw a jump in income and expenditure due to increased government funding in employment programs as a response to the recession.

Expenditure breakdown within service areas:

Care for older people: 59.2%

Employment services: 26.8%

Family services and material aid: 7.0%

Aid to individuals: 4.6%

Grants to other organisations: 2.3%

Audited accounts are publicly available.



Community Aid Abroad (merged with Freedom From Hunger)

Philosophy and main activities:

"Community Aid Abroad (CAA) is an independent, voluntary and community-based Australian organisation, affiliated with Oxfam International. It promotes social justice and the alleviation of poverty through its campaigns, education and advocacy, and development of aid projects overseas and in Aboriginal Australia. Its central aim is to enable communities to challenge the causes of global inequality and environmental destruction."

Main beneficiaries: The most disadvantaged groups in developing countries. Programs are assessed on the basis of need, and the capacity of the partner organisations to become self-reliant and to replicate programs.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 to CAA's various projects are tax-deductible. Major donors and groups can identify preferred projects for their donations. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs.

Feedback to donors: Annual report, quarterly newsletter *Horizons*, project bulletins to AWARE donors (who give regular monthly donations), quarterly campaign bulletin to Campaign Partners (who support CAA's campaign work).

Income in 1992/93: \$16.9 million (1992/93 was not a typical year, as community income through fund-raising was severely affected by the recession. Government funds were about normal.)

Government funding in 1992/93: 3.7% of total income

Total expenditure breakdown 1992/93:

Programs: 65.4%
Fund-raising and promotion: 23.4%
General administration: 6.9%
Reserves: 4.3%

Expenditure breakdown within project areas:

Overseas programs: 80.6%
Campaigns and education: 16.2%
Aboriginal programs: 3.3%
Operating expenditure for 1992/93 included some high costs in rationalising the activities of the two former organisations (Community Aid Abroad and Australian Freedom From Hunger Campaign). Figures for 1993/94 indicate that more than 70% of funds received will be spent on programs. Audited accounts are publicly available.



National Heart Foundation of Australia

Philosophy and main activities:

'Saving lives' is the main objective of the National Heart Foundation of Australia (NHF). Its activities include research into heart and blood vessel disease, community education and health promotion related to heart disease, and raising funds to support research and education. The NHF is not affiliated with any other organisation.

Main beneficiaries: The general public is the ultimate beneficiary of research and education programs funded by the NHF.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 to various projects are tax-deductible and donors can specify preferred projects. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs and are encouraged to give out the organisation's address and/or telephone number so people can check their credentials.

Feedback to donors: Annual report, regular newsletter, publications (pamphlets and brochures on heart disease).

Income in 1993: \$18.7 million (plus an additional income of \$4.4 million which, according to the NHF, relates to specific projects undertaken in the name of the NHF, but are not related to the NHF's normal income and expenditure.)

Government funding in 1993: None. The NHF is totally funded by public donations and contributions.

Total expenditure breakdown 1993:

Programs: 66%
Fund-raising: 23%
Administration and communications: 11%
Expenditure breakdown within program areas:

Research: 56%
Education and rehabilitation: 44%
Audited accounts are publicly available.



Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia

Philosophy and main activities:

The Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia "endorse the UN resolution on the rights of disabled people" and strive to "provide high-quality, safe, independent mobility to people who have a vision disability". The organisation's main activities include the provision of guide dogs, orientation and mobility training and stroke rehabilitation programs where sight is affected. It also provides information resources in the community to enhance awareness of the special needs of people with visual disabilities. The organisation is not affiliated with any other organisation.

Main beneficiaries: Programs are provided free of charge to people whose sight is affected and who seek these services.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 to various projects are tax-deductible and donors can specify preferred projects.

Feedback to donors: Annual reports, quarterly newsletters.

Income in 1992/93: \$7.5 million

Government funding in 1992/93: 13.5% of total income ("prevailing economic conditions impacted on revenue and government funding").

Total expenditure breakdown in 1992/93:

Funds received from donations, bequests and legacies are almost wholly spent on various programs (see below). Administration and fund-raising costs are met by income from the association's commercial activities.

Expenditure breakdown within project areas:

Kennels: 23%
Breeding: 21%
Dog training: 19%
Puppywalking: 18%
Cadet training: 13%
Client instruction: 6%
The association's accounts are audited but not publicly available.



THE SMITH FAMILY



The Salvation Army

Philosophy and main activities:

"The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical branch of the universal Christian Church." Its purpose is to "live and proclaim a practical Christian faith and to reach out to people in need". Its activities include life development programs; practical and spiritual support for people in economic hardship, drug and alcohol dependents, victims of accidents and disasters and hospital patients; shelter for homeless people; protection of families brutalised by domestic violence; counsel for prisoners and those in need of court welfare; comfort and companionship for elderly people, and retraining for youth and adult long-term unemployed people.

Main beneficiaries: People in need.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 are tax-deductible. Gifts to designated projects are welcome. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs and are encouraged to give out the organisation's address and/or telephone number.

Feedback to donors: Annual reports, newsletters. Donors are also invited to visit Salvation Army centres to inspect the work they are supporting.

Income in 1992/93: \$261.6 million (nationally for the organisation's charitable arm)

Government funding in 1992/93: 28.4% (includes a special \$3.4 million Commonwealth Government grant during Christmas 1992/January 1993)

Total expenditure breakdown 1992/93:

The Salvation Army is administered in Australia as two territories directly responsible to international headquarters in London. Separate sets of audited accounts are publicly available. At present, the two territories prepare their accounts to different standards, which makes it difficult to compare or tally expenditure figures nationally. It is planned that by 1995/96 both territories' accounting procedures will conform to the Australian Accounting Standards.

The 1992/93 Red Shield Appeal raised \$35.8 million; 16.5% was charged against it as overheads. If request income and expenditure were added, fund-raising costs would be reduced to 10%.

Expenditure breakdown within main project areas:

Senior citizens and nursing homes: \$61.8 m
Rehabilitation and counselling: \$25.8 m
Family services: \$17.3 m
Youth and children care services: \$17.3 m

Smith Family

Philosophy and main activities:

"The Smith Family is a non-sectarian and non-political charity which seeks to break the poverty cycle through practical programs of assistance." Its main activity is emergency relief — food, shelter and clothing — for those in need, with the aim of keeping families together. Through its second activity, the EDU-CATE program, the organisation "seeks to break the poverty cycle of children identified as 'high-risk early school leavers' by encouraging them to complete secondary schooling and reach their potential by a process of family counselling and a financial scholarship". The Smith Family is not affiliated with any other organisation.

Main beneficiaries: People on full Department of Social Security benefits or pensions and people on low incomes. Assistance is given according to the degree of need, the actual problems and how best the client can be assisted to overcome the problem.

Donations: Donors can specify whether they want to support the organisation's emergency relief or to sponsor a child on the EDU-CATE program. Donations of more than \$2 are tax-deductible.

Feedback to donors: Donors to emergency relief receive newsletters and information; members also receive an annual report. EDU-CATE sponsors receive profiles and reports of their sponsored child, a regular newsletter and can phone a 008 line for information.

Income in 1992/93: \$25.5 million

Government funding in 1992/93: 12.1% of total income. (Government grants include 'one-off' items such as the Federal Christmas Appeal Matching Grant, Aged People's Homes Upgrading Grants and State Recession Package, for which there is no guarantee of continuity.)

Expenditure breakdown 1992/93:

Direct welfare services (includes wages, other welfare-related costs and an allocation of overhead costs): 84.3%
Fund-raising and community education: 10.2%
Administration and other costs: 5.5%
Audited accounts are publicly available.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul

Philosophy and main activities:

"The Society of St Vincent de Paul is an international Catholic organisation which works with people in need on a person-to-person basis. It also seeks to develop the Christian faith of its members, in the belief that serving people in need is central to Christianity." The organisation provides a wide range of services, among them childcare, budget counselling, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, accommodation, support for disabled, mentally ill and aged people, migrants, refugees and prisoners.

Main beneficiaries: Poor, unemployed or marginalised people regardless of their race, religion or circumstances. About 44% are unemployed people, 40% are single parents and 83% receive government benefits.

Donations: Donations of more than \$2 to the organisation's various projects are tax-deductible. In most cases, major donors can identify preferred projects for their donations. Volunteer street collectors or 'door knockers' carry IDs and are encouraged to give out the organisation's address and/or telephone number.

Feedback to donors: Annual reports (produced in most states and some local areas), national magazine *The Record*, various state/local newsletters, reports on major appeals, 'thank you' letters and receipts for a donation.

Income in 1992/93: Approximately \$180 million nationally.

Government funding in 1992/93: About 30% of total income.

Expenditure within project areas: Material assistance (cash and goods): \$30 million

National figures for other priority areas (accommodation, refugees and aged care) are unavailable. The Society of St Vincent de Paul operates in a decentralised fashion, which results in a wide diversity of activities and a lack of uniform and centralised statistics at national level. However, most State Councils are maintaining uniform statistics which are increasingly comparable across the states. Figures on state and local activities are available at those levels.

All the organisation's various arms should be able to produce business accounts on request. In some states, they are made available through annual reports.



GREEN PAGE

PLASTICS RECYCLING — PROGRESS AND PAIN

Australians love recycling, but with plastics the news is mixed: lack of viable markets, cynical cashing in on 'recyclable' logos — and some progress too. The message for consumers is, "Put your money where your good intentions are".

IT'S NICE TO BE ABLE TO HAND OUT some praise to an industry for beneficial environmental initiatives. The third annual publication of the *Plastics Recycling Register* deserves a pat on the back. The glossy booklet is produced by the Plastics Industry Association (PIA) in an attempt to provide information about, and generally promote, plastics recycling and, perhaps, lift the industry's decidedly 'non-green' image a little. It is a worthwhile project, well executed.

The big problem with all recycling is finding markets for the material. A lack of buyers means all the good intentions in the world will yield only landfill or growing stockpiles. The *Register* goes some way to alleviating that. It provides listings of companies which accept different kinds of plastic, from car battery cases to Tupperware, along with restric-

tions such as whether the waste must be presorted, minimum tonnages accepted and whether household refuse is accepted.

It also catalogues a range of products made (or partially made) of recycled material and the companies that produce them. Distributed free to industry, schools and the public, it aims to help create markets for those products by promoting recycling to both consumers and industry. It appears to be working to some extent. Since the *Register* was first published the number of recycled plastic products has grown apace, according to the PIA's environmental manager, Helen Lewis, who largely compiled it.

It earns a bouquet for its good intentions and for suggestions such as personally recycling shopping bags as *shopping bags* many times and then using them for bin liners. This is not the sort of tip you might expect from a manufacturers' group whose commercial interest, after all, is in selling more product.

Collectors in crisis

The Recyclers' Association of Victoria, which represents the contractors who pick up household waste, recently told a federal parliamentary committee that urgent action was needed to prevent the collapse of recycling programs altogether. It said the recycling industry was in a state of crisis and called for legislation to make the use of recycled plastics and newsprint compulsory in manufacturing when they could be used instead of imported material.

President of the association, David Bourke, told us

collectors were being "squeezed to death" between the low fees paid by local councils on the one hand, and the depressed prices the material was currently fetching on the other. The association's complaint with councils in Victoria is that the contracts they are letting for kerbside collection are only short-term, which severely hampers the collection firms' ability to invest in more efficient equipment or plan their businesses.

Also, Bourke said, the contracts are 'fixed fee' only, taking no account of increases in volume. In other words, the collectors get the same money even though the amount of material they are picking up has increased dramatically — as much as 68% in the last year in some cases, according to Bourke — as householders embrace recycling.

The other big problem for collectors is that people don't realise many types of plastic are only technically recyclable. Mixed plastics are effectively non-recyclable, since the process of manually sorting them is so expensive and such a high proportion of them are plastics for which there is no viable market. Bourke claims this is exacerbated by manufacturers who put the familiar triangular 'recyclable material' logos on products even though there is currently no reprocessing market for the material from which they are made.

Bourke said consumers fail to understand that without a market, it is not feasible to collect and sort the material, much of which will end up as landfill. The result is growing hostility from residents directed at the collectors when they refuse to take certain kinds of waste. He claims some councils have even told the collectors to "pick up everything", with the offer of free use of the local tip, which, if it's true, would seem to make a mockery of collection programs, not to mention responsible use of ratepayers' money.



Peter Woods, president of the NSW Local Government Association, said it wouldn't surprise him at all if there had been incidences of recycling programs degenerating into this farcical state of affairs. He said councils are put in the invidious position of having to do something with the material when residents respond enthusiastically to collection programs, encouraged by 'recyclable' logos proliferating on all manner of products. Woods wants to see strong legislation to enforce industry responsibility for the waste it produces, with the effect that "if you stick the [recyclable] logo on it, it's coming back to you".

However, he argued that it wasn't for councils to carry the can for industry when it comes to waste management. This view was echoed by Jan Salmon, the environment and conservation policy officer for the Municipal Association of Victoria. She told us it was unfair to expect councils to pick up the tab every time market fluctuations caused problems for collectors.

Peter Jones is the commercial affairs manager for Kemcor Australia, a partner in Full Cycle Plastics, which recycles high-density polyethylene (HDPE) from milk and juice bottles into resin for a range of products. He told us that currently low prices for the recycled material were a direct reflection of "the lowest prices for well over a decade" for virgin resin. Plastics makers all over the world are going broke or struggling due to an international glut of resin, he said.

The price paid to collectors for HDPE (mainly milk containers) fell last year from its peak of around \$500 per tonne to \$200-\$250. The collectors claim it can cost up to \$1000 a tonne to collect, sort, bale and transport the stuff, and that the fees paid by councils go nowhere near covering costs. The used milk containers can currently fetch up to \$350 per tonne if the coloured tops are removed, since this generates a more valuable, low-colour resin. Again, this is labour intensive and costly and has the collectors pulling their hair out and asking why the tops can't be made in the same colour and material in the first place.

A spokesperson for one dairy company told us it has three different products on the market in two-litre bottles and needs different-coloured tops to differentiate them in supermarkets, especially when they are offered in crates with the labels obscured. This hardly seems a compelling reason if the result is to jeopardise the recycling programs for these containers. In fairness, though, she also said the problem had never been drawn to the company's attention before, indicating

THINGS GO FURTHER WITH COKE

ONE AREA of plastics recycling that is widely acknowledged as a growing success is that of polyethylene terephthalate (PET). It is estimated that around 30% of this product is now being recycled in NSW and Victoria, up from 2% since 1989.

Part of the credit for this must go to the efforts of the ACI Petalite company. With an American company (another subsidiary of ACI's parent, BTR Nyllex) it has developed a new process using 'multilayer recycling technology' that has enabled the world's first production of food-grade plastic containers partly made of recycled material.

Essentially the bottles — already in use by Coca-Cola Amatil in some states — are a 'sandwich' of two layers of food-grade virgin plastic with a third of recycled PET in between. The recycled content is currently around 25% and the aim is to increase this figure gradually.

This 'Multilayer Repete System', as it is known, is an important world first and has been approved by both the US Food and Drug Administration and the National Food Authority in Australia. The company has even earned the approbation of conservationists for spending the considerable effort and money needed to develop the process, which helps bring PET recycling 'full cycle' for the first time. Containers partly made of recycled material can be collected and used again to make the same product, helping to create their own market.

The Coca-Cola company, obviously sensing the public relations advantages of association with such a breakthrough, has, to its credit, backed the development of this process by guaranteeing an end-user market: a big one.



The new Coke bottle — partly made from recycled plastic (PET).

perhaps a failure of communications from the recyclers to industry.

What can consumers do to help?

There is general agreement that Australians have enthusiastically backed recycling at the level of putting their household refuse out for collection. However, that is only half the story. Collection programs in the absence of viable markets for the material equal stockpiles or landfill. The collectors argue the quickest way to get bottle tops in the same material as the bottle would be for sufficient consumers to ring the companies supplying their milk and soft drinks and complain.

If you're putting any containers out for recycling, remove all caps no matter what the material, otherwise someone else has to do it later and the whole process becomes that much less viable. Bear in mind that there are over 20 000 two-litre milk bottles to the tonne. That's a lot of tops to take off for \$250. Coloured HDPE milk bottle tops can be recycled separately into products in which colour content isn't important, such as pipes and garbage bins.

According to Peter Jones, some 'wheely bins' on the market contain 50% recycled HDPE, which represents 125 plastic milk bottles or two and a half

years' worth if your household averages one per week. Using stormwater pipes made of the same material in new housing subdivisions would consume the equivalent of ten years' worth for each house built, it is claimed. Consumers could pressure their local councils and members of parliament to embrace this type of product at the level of government purchasing as well as just implementing collection programs.

Jones argues that the whole recycling issue is consumer driven: if consumers demand recycled products, industry will quickly move in to supply them. So far Australians do not seem to have done so in big numbers. As well as keeping our kerbsides supplied with the material, we need to buy it back from the supermarket too and ask for it where it isn't available. And if you feel deceived after buying a product that is labelled 'recyclable' only to find the collector won't take it, you could try mailing it back to the maker with a promise not to buy it again. It would be interesting to see the effects on the current level of industry self-regulation.

■ To obtain a copy of the *Plastics Recycling Register* call the PIA office in your capital city or the national office on (03) 654 2199, or fax (03) 654 2384.



CONSUMER IN LAW

DIAL 'P' FOR PRIVACY

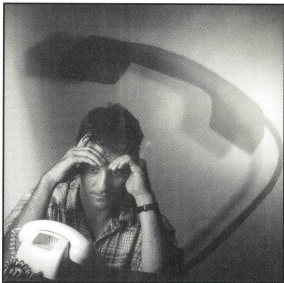
You might think making a humble phone call is a simple and essentially private thing. With the onward rush of telecommunications technology, however, that simplicity is disappearing. Moves are currently afoot that could radically alter the level of privacy as well.

IN RECENT MONTHS Telecom has been deluged by waves of adverse publicity connected to the sensitive issue of telephone privacy. It has had to defend itself against some very bad press surrounding the so-called 'COT cases' and fight a rearguard action against a public furor over allowing a reverse telephone directory business to operate as a 0055 service, all while planning a detailed four-month trial of a new and highly controversial service called Calling Number Display (CND). It has its hands full of red hot privacy issues and is juggling them earnestly, if awkwardly.

An organisation of disgruntled business owners calling itself Casualties of Telecom (COT) has waged a campaign seeking compensation for alleged damage to their businesses sustained as a result of problems with their phone services. It is further alleged that in the course of their wrangles with Telecom, some of their phone calls were intercepted and recorded.

The minister responsible for telecommunications, Michael Lee, was sufficiently alarmed by the allegations to refer them to the Federal Police for investigation. That investigation is "continuing" but an Austel report into the matter, released in April, was highly critical of some of Telecom's handling of some aspects of these matters. Telecom, meanwhile, is settling on a process of arbitration with some of the 'COT cases' whereby they can come to some arrangement without the messy and expensive business of going to court. The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is assisting in this process.

The ombudsman's office is a recent



innovation. It was set up to receive and arbitrate on complaints about telecommunications carriers which have been taken up with the carrier concerned but not resolved to the consumer's satisfaction. Perceived breaches of telephone privacy form part of its jurisdiction.

At the very least, Telecom has admitted to some breach of its own operational code of conduct. Whether that code is seen as adequate protection for individual telephone privacy as a consequence is a matter for all consumers to consider, not just the Minister. The Privacy Commissioner, in his annual report last year, expressed concern that the Telecommunications Act (1991) does not address "the full range of privacy matters necessary to provide an internationally acceptable level of privacy rights".

He went on to draw attention to an anomaly in the law which binds only employees of telecommunications carriers to the secrecy provisions of section 88

of the Act, not the carriers themselves. The Commissioner declared that privacy interference was much more likely to be "attributable to the actions of carriers" rather than their individual employees.

Who is allowed to bug you?

The Telecommunications (Interception) Act, 1979 (amended in 1993), says that, "A person shall not: a) intercept; b) authorise, suffer or permit another person to intercept; or c) do any act or thing that will enable him or another person to intercept; a communication passing over a telecommunications system." Except ...

The Act goes on to list some fairly wide-ranging exemptions, centred mainly on national security, law enforcement and telephone carriers' needs to monitor lines for technical and maintenance reasons. There is also provision for emergency requests to intercept and trace calls where there is a risk of death or serious injury.

The rights and wrongs of Telecom's actions in the above-mentioned 'COT cases' are yet to be determined at the time of writing, but if they are what they appear and turn out to have been technically legal under the 'technical and maintenance' provisions, it is thought the government might give serious consideration to tightening the laws. We would hope so.

A brief history of bugging

The Australian Constitution bestows on Federal Parliament the authority to make laws about all postal, telephone and like services. In the first instance it did this with the Post and Telegraph Act, 1901, but it wasn't until 1960 that it was

thought necessary to legislate to govern the interception of telecommunications. During the previous decade telephone interceptions had been in accordance with a prime ministerial directive dating from 1950. With cold war paranoia at its height, it was very much the wicked secret agents of foreign powers this directive had in mind, authorising interceptions only of phones suspected to be used for "espionage, sabotage or subversive activities..." Aside from interceptions for technical reasons and those authorised by warrants obtainable only by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), all other interceptions of phone messages became offences under law for the first time with the 1960 Act. Australians had their first legislated rights to telephone privacy, rights which seem to have been eroded ever since.

Police forces didn't rate a mention during the debate which determined this position in the early 1960s. The Attorney General of the time, Garfield Barwick, was downright dismissive on this score. He told parliament the government had weighed the pros and cons of giving police and customs powers to intercept, and rejected the idea. "I do not think it is necessary for me to pursue the reasons ..." he said.

This seems extraordinary by today's standards and demonstrates that privacy considerations enjoyed a primacy in public policy that may be cause for reflection today, since this brief history is a history of proliferating powers accorded to various authorities to intercept phone calls and of the diminishing importance placed on personal privacy. (In 1992-93, 527 warrants for intercepts were granted, with six being refused or withdrawn. This figure was an increase of 62 from the previous year, which in turn was 85 up on the one before.)

Any bias towards privacy was history by 1979, when both government and opposition supported widening of interception powers to include 'customs purposes': a euphemism for drug-related law enforcement. The Telecommunications (Interception) Act, 1979, became law. In 1986 a further distribution of these powers was proposed, to include state police forces and bodies like the National Crime Authority (NCA) and also to cover a range of non-drug-related criminal activity: essentially, any offence punishable by seven years' imprisonment or more. In 1987 the Telecommunications Interceptions Division (TID) of the Federal Police was set up to execute all warrants on behalf of all the various agen-

cies. Such warrants can only be issued by certain Federal Court judges.

These laws also made it a punishable offence to listen to or record any communication (including a far wider range of messages and 'data' than just conversations) during its passage over the telecommunications system without the knowledge of the parties to it.

This gets us into some pretty complicated territory. First, there is no illegal interception when the person making the communication is aware that it is being listened to or recorded. This is to take account of a range of circumstances where you would have no expectation of privacy — for instance if you called a radio talkback program. One Supreme Court judgment, however, held that this leaves the called person unprotected and ruled that you can only record those parts of the conversation you yourself utter: that is, you are the "person making

Interceptions of phone messages became offences under law for the first time with the 1960 Act. Australians had their first legislated rights to telephone privacy, rights which seem to have been eroded ever since.

the communication" during those bits, but taping the replies is the illegal part.

Second, there is no offence unless the communication is intercepted "during its passage" over the system. That means while it is anywhere in the system in the form of electrical signals, but not before it enters or after it leaves. That is, placing a tape recorder next to your phone receiver to record a conversation (or, more effectively, using a stick-on acoustic pick-up device available for a few dollars from many electronics stores) is not covered by this Act. Most states, however, have 'listening devices' or 'privacy protection' legislation which covers such practices. Again, knowledge and consent of the other party is central.

This echoes one of the most essential privacy principles and consumer rights, that of 'informed consent'. This principle lies at the centre of the controversy about new phone services such as Calling Number Display (see right). Such services have far-reaching ramifications and consumers need all the information they can get before they are asked to agree to their introduction.

Finally, the federal legislation says there is no interception where the listen-

ing or recording facility forms part of an approved service. An example is a second or third phone extension in your home. It's not illegal to pick up the upstairs phone and listen in. You can even buy Austel-approved devices which record phone conversations, but most emit beeps to signal this to the other party. Exceptions are made for equipment that is used, for example, by police to monitor lines during a siege.

Alphabet soup: CLIs, CNDs, TIMS, ISDNs, ACRs and ACEs

Depending on how you look at it, we are about to be offered either the most dazzling array of brilliant, hi-tech telecommunications services and products imaginable, or the most bewildering torrent of acronyms representing mysterious and treacherous new technologies with mind-boggling potential to destroy our domestic peace and privacy forever.

Hopefully, we might end up with something sane in between.

Calling Line Identification (CLI) is an integral feature of modern telecommunications systems. State-of-the-art switching systems make possible a wondrous array of new gadgets and services. If you receive an itemised account from Telecom or Optus, it is made possible by this digital technology. CLI information, including your name and number, is necessarily transmitted with each call, which allows a range of possibilities besides itemised bills.

In the small country town of Wauchope, NSW, Telecom has begun a four-month trial of the star of this show, Calling Number Display (CND). This facility has been around for some years overseas and Telecom would like to introduce it in Australia. (In fact, a form of it already operates: calls to the 000 emergency service now register the calling number and address, though not the subscriber's name. Didn't know that? There's a notice in the front of the *White Pages*.)

Simply put, CND means that when you phone someone, he or she can see your number on a screen display before deciding whether to answer; provided, that is, they have paid for the privilege. One reason carriers like Telecom are so keen on this is that plenty of people will do just that.

All well and good. At issue here are two privacy interests: that of the called person and that of the one making the call. CND is promoted as privacy protection since, if you subscribe to it, it allows you to ignore incoming calls from numbers you don't like the look of: say, your

ex-husband's. Opponents argue that an answering machine achieves the same result better, since it lets you screen out actual voices, not just numbers, most of which you won't know — unless, perhaps, you live in a friendly place like Wauchope — and which anyway tell you nothing about *who* is calling. It seems fairly obvious that anyone intent on a phone call which they suspect will be ignored upon recognition of their number can simply use a different phone.

However, besides this rather dubious privacy protection, what CND also does is to alter radically the privacy status of all phones, including yours, overnight. There are dozens of instances where people have a wish, an expectation, and arguably a right, to make a phone call without revealing their identity. It is always the called party's prerogative to hang up if they don't like it.

Perhaps you want to ask someone out to dinner but chicken out at the last minute. Perhaps you want to report your next-door neighbour for suspected child abuse. Perhaps you want to make an enquiry to the tax office about allowable deductions or to a series of dealers about the price of a car you are considering buying. In all of these cases CND would enable the party called to know your phone number. Perhaps your children phone your ex-wife and unintentionally disclose the new phone number you didn't want her to know. What about police informer phone-in campaigns of the 'dob in a drug dealer' type?

Thanks for calling, now we know where you live

With the right equipment, CND information can be captured, recorded and put to all sorts of uses. Businesses can match it to existing customer records to call up your account even before answering the phone — and, perhaps, direct you straight to 'accounts receivable'. On the other hand, it could be used to offer new and exciting levels of service, where the person fielding your enquiry has instant access to your buying history and gives you the 'regular customer VIP treatment'.

However, such information can also be used to compile lists that can be used in follow-up direct marketing (how many car dealers did you ring?) or even sold on to other telemarketers. Combined with reverse directory software and databases, your phone number can quickly be converted to your name and address, from which financial, credit and

a host of other personal information held on databases is a short step.

At the moment 'White Pages on CD-ROM' and reverse directory services, created by pirating Telecom's directories, are still freely available. In fairness, Telecom has recently taken steps to try to prevent the operation of reverse directories. On February 23 it announced that it would assert its copyright over the *White Pages* and *Yellow Pages* directories, to prevent such 'open slather' access to address details derived from phone numbers.

A Senate Select Committee report said, "The successful enforcement of copyright" would allow Telecom to control the availability of these services. Of course, the key word here is "successful".



Combined with reverse directory software and databases, your phone number can quickly be converted to your name and address, from which financial, credit and a host of other personal information held on databases is a short step.

The legalities of this are yet to be tested and there is some doubt whether Telecom would succeed. In the US, similar attempts to enforce copyright of phone directories have met with defeat in the courts.

The fact that Telecom briefly allowed such a service to operate from a 0055 number might be taken to indicate a corporate attitude — at least in some sections of the enormous organisation — in which commercial possibilities are considered first, with customer privacy a poor second.

Calling Line Identification also makes possible a range of other services, which are not dependent on the calling number being displayed. These include call-return (for those times the ringing stops just as you pick it up), and even up to three different types of ring to indicate

nominated classes of incoming call. There are facilities that let you respond to an obscene or nuisance call by sending a code to the exchange which registers the number from which the call was made for following up by appropriate authorities. Another allows you to enter a code to prevent that last number from ever calling you again. The consequences for a subscriber whose phone is misused by someone else are worth considering.

Options: opt-in, opt-out, per line, per call ... how much?

If the result of the Wauchope trial is highly negative, Telecom sources say the introduction of CND is unlikely to proceed in Australia. On the other hand, if everyone in Wauchope loves it, it doesn't

mean there are no further questions to resolve. It should be noted that industry specialists and even consumer and privacy advocates are at pains to give Telecom credit for the careful way it has approached this issue. It has set up a consultative committee with consumer representatives, held public meetings in Wauchope to air the issues and spent a lot of money and effort on holding the trial in the first place. Technically, there's nothing to stop it just introducing CND tomorrow. It is widely acknowledged that Telecom does not want to ride rough-shod over its customers' concerns and is trying hard to handle these matters sensitively.

With this kind of technology, almost anything is possible. In theory there is a range of options for CND introduction. It could be opt-in: subscribers would have to request that their phones transmit the number; or opt-out: it would be

done automatically unless you actively sought blocking for your number. As to blocking, it can be either **per call**: a sequence of buttons stops the number going out; or **per line**: your line is permanently blocked. In reality, unless it can have an opt-out system, Telecom won't proceed because it is the only commercially viable way to go. This points to where the really big advantages in CND lie: business.

If Telecom can deliver the vast bulk of subscribers' numbers whenever they call, business will pay for it. Privacy advocates argue this would mean requiring people to inform themselves about complex issues and take steps just to preserve their present level of privacy. Though this might seem simple, remembering to dial a prefix every call is problematic. Bob Mansfield, the head of Optus, is on

record as saying that his own family often forgot to dial the '1' for Optus during the Telecom/Optus trial period. There is even the possibility that Telecom might want to charge for the service of not transmitting your number, though that's not likely. In Canada, one carrier charged 85 cents per call for this 'service', but not for long.

Privacy principles would suggest that, at the very least, consumers should be given the option of preserving the status of their phone service free of charge, whether per call or per line.

If per line blocking seems the ideal solution to you, don't worry, they've thought of that too. There are already Anonymous Call Rejection (ACR) systems operating overseas which block callers. It's getting like a game of privacy tennis. Call these phones without transmitting your number and all you get is a message saying the line doesn't accept anonymous calls. Fifteen all. Not only does this represent a degrading of your phone service, since access to a whole range of numbers is now denied to you, US carriers in such instances treat the whole transaction as a 'completed call', charging both the caller for the pleasure of being rejected and the recipient for the service of screening them out. You perceive the appeal of all these new gadgets to the carriers. That's two charges for no communication. Game and set to the phone company.

Some further problems

Other technological marvels that have come to haunt consumers overseas include ACE, or Automatic Calling Equipment. This machinery makes marketing or surveying calls in bulk, all by itself, day and night if so instructed. If the idea of being phoned at midnight by a machine with a commercial message is less than appealing, consider the feelings of those in the US who have discovered that the equipment can even be programmed to call you back patiently every time you hang up until you have listened to its story; the *whole* story.

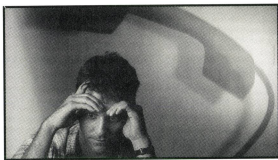
These machines are hungry for numbers. With CND, just ringing their owners with a product enquiry has the potential to feed them yours. Telecom, when it had control of such things, had severe restrictions on the use of this equipment. With deregulation all such authority passed to Austel, but while it has technical standards related to any effects of the equipment on the phone system, it has

no power to prevent or regulate its use for privacy or any other reasons.

Telephone Information Management Systems (TIMS) allow businesses to record and analyse all manner of details about their employees' usage of phone and fax equipment and have attracted the attention of various concerned groups. The Labor Council of NSW and that state's Privacy Committee jointly published a guidelines document for the use of TIMS which expressed sharp concerns over their potential for surveillance and harassment of employees.

Regulate or abdicate?

All these new telecommunications products and services are laden with potential benefits and pitfalls: the question is, for



Australia really needs ... a Privacy Act that covers both the private and public sectors, in which principles of fair dealing with private information and protection of consumer interests can be enshrined with the force of law.

whom? (Other reasonable questions include: Who will pay? How much? What options and protection will be provided to ordinary consumers?) The sheer number, novelty and complexity of them and their possible ramifications mean a massive public education effort will be required if the consumer rights principle of 'informed choice' is even to get a look in.

Austel, the governing body of the telecommunications industry in Australia, issued a detailed report on privacy issues at the end of 1992. Its recommendations are still being considered by government, but it came down firmly on the side of self-imposed codes of conduct for the industry, as against legislated regulation. It proposed a committee of industry, consumer and government representatives to develop voluntary codes for the whole proliferating range of telecommunications businesses. This was described by one

consumer advocate as "a body with no teeth and no real home". The report also suggested an expansion of the Privacy Act to cover the private sector.

In the words of Dr Peter White, a Melbourne academic who has conducted studies of the overseas experience with these innovations, there is an "overlay of anxiety" — not necessarily justified — about these developments, arising from what he calls the "horror stories" in the US. The first CND-type systems there were introduced without any consent or any provisions for blocking at all. A massive consumer backlash ensued and most states now have some form of regulation, though some phone companies have struggled bitterly against it. The Clinton/Gore administration is in the throes of launching a Consumer Bill of Rights, seeking to guarantee, among other things, that information provided by a consumer for a specific purpose cannot be used for another without his or her *knowledge and consent*.

Dr White argues that the innovation Australia really needs is a Privacy Act that covers both the private and public sectors, in which principles of fair dealing with private information and protection of consumer interests can be enshrined with the force of law.

The Consumers' Association is party to a body called The Australian Privacy Charter Council, which has laboured to produce a draft *Australian Privacy Charter*. It says, among other things, "Australians have a right to enjoy a balance between the power of authorities and corporations, and the autonomy of individuals." Principle number nine of the draft charter is: "Your information should only be used for the purpose of its original collection".

In one view, what a telephone carrier is in effect doing in providing CND facilities to a business is selling it your phone number in the event that you call it. We think people have every right to make private phone calls without making themselves targets for direct marketing — or revealing their identity or location — if they so choose. If telephone carriers want to introduce this kind of technology with its complex and far-reaching effects, it should be up to them to sell its advantages to us individually. A technological change which puts 'up for sale' the personal details supplied by every subscriber to the carrier in order to have a phone service connected, without their active consent, is dangerously at odds with basic privacy principles. □



FROM OUR LAB

G-CODE INSTANT VIDEO PROGRAMMER

*Is it the long dreamed of panacea for video programming woes
or just another piece of confusing technology?*

THE STORY GOES that, responding to a public plea by George Bush, two ex-Aerospace scientists took on the challenge to solve the world's VCR programming woes. The result was a system known in Australia as 'G-Code' (the G stands for Gemstar, the company which developed it).

The idea is that television guides will publish a number — the G-Code — alongside each program. Programming your video recorder would then be a simple matter of typing into the G-Code programmer the appropriate code for the program you wish to tape. The G-Code decoder works out the date, start time, stop time and channel from the

Just punch in the number printed in your TV guide and the G-Code programmer will (hopefully) record the right program.



G-CODE INSTANT VIDEO PROGRAMMER

Manufacturer/distributor: Gemstar/Philips

Target price: \$129

Warranty: Six months on parts and labour.

Country of origin: China

number you enter. More of the major TV guides in Australia will be publishing these codes this year.

G-Code was introduced in the USA as 'VCR+' in late 1990. Since then, many countries, including Canada, Japan, the UK and New Zealand, have adopted the system and many video recorders sold in these countries now have G-Code built in.

The system was launched in Australia in March of this year when Philips began distributing a battery-powered stand-alone unit, called the G-CODE Instant video programmer designed to work with existing video recorders. It looks like a small version of a portable CD player and operates your video recorder with an infrared transmitter in the same way as the video's own remote control. We bought one of these programmers and tried it out in our lab to see how it compared to the traditional programming methods.

MAKING IT TALK TO YOUR VCR

Before you can use the G-Code Instant video programmer you need to set it up so that it talks to your video recorder. The programmer works by mimicking your video's remote control, so the first thing you have to do, after installing the batteries, is to tell it what brand of video recorder you own. This is done by entering a code from a comprehensive list of brands given in the instructions. The programmer then tries to switch on your video using its library of built-in codes for the brand of video recorder you specified. Once it finds the right one you save the information and move on.

To complete the set-up you need to set the programmer's clock, tell it which VCR presets the local channels are stored in and do a check to see that it can change the channels on your video properly. While all this sounds a bit confusing, it's actually

fairly straightforward if you follow the instructions and your video recorder is fully compatible with the programmer — and therein lies the rub!

COMPATIBILITY

Philips claims the G-CODE Instant video programmer will work with most video recorders that sport a remote control. To test compatibility and ease of set-up, we tried the programmer out with all the video recorders we reported on in last month's issue (*Mid-priced video recorders*, May 1994). While the programmer was easily set up to work with most of the 11 models, four of them — the MITSUBISHI HS-MX3, PANASONIC NV-SD10, SHARP VC-B60 and SAMSUNG VB-350 — provided us with a few problems. In the case of the SAMSUNG the programmer could switch the video on and select the correct channel but couldn't tell it to record. With the other three models the programmer initially had trouble reliably selecting the correct channel to record, though we were able to get them working after some experimentation.

When we struck these problems the instruction manual proved to be largely inadequate. In general, the manual is reasonably well written and easy to follow, but it doesn't provide enough information on what to do if things go wrong. For a product aimed at solving your video programming blues the manual should provide far more explanation and help.

PHONE HELP

Although the manual isn't much use if you hit trouble, the warranty card offers a toll-free phone number to put you through to operators at Philips who may be better able to sort out your problems. A spokesperson for Philips claims these operators should be able to talk people through most problems they encounter when trying to set up the programmer. If it turns out that the programmer just won't work with your video they'll ar-

range for you to get your money back from the retailer.

We tested out the help-line by calling up anonymously to get aid with the problem we were experiencing with the SAMSUNG video recorder. We got through with no trouble and the operator we talked to was polite and helpful. Although they couldn't fix our problem (the programmer apparently has trouble with the SAMSUNG remote codes) they did offer to help arrange a refund through the retailer.

PROGRAMMING BECOMES ADULTS' PLAY

Once set up, the G-CODE Instant video programmer makes timer recording much easier than programming the video recorder directly. All that's necessary is to enter the code number given in the TV guide for the show you want to record (see photo) and then press a button for either once only recording, recording at the same time every week or recording at the same time every weekday. The programmer momentarily pops up the date, time and channel of the show you've selected on its built-in display so you can make sure you're recording the correct thing. It can store up to 12 programs at any one time.

You need to leave your video recorder switched off with a blank cassette inserted. You leave the programmer in its cradle which is designed to sit the programmer in a suitable position on top of your video recorder. At the appropriate time the programmer will switch on your video, change to the desired channel and set the video to record. At the end of the show the programmer stops the video and turns it off.

CONCLUSIONS

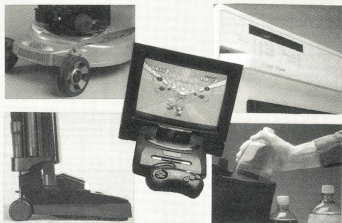
Using G-Codes is definitely a much easier way to program a video than the more traditional methods. Video recorders which have G-Code programming built-in may well, when they're available, come close to solving people's recording woes. In the meantime the G-CODE Instant video programmer does provide a good solution for the many people who find video programming a frustrating experience.

We have some concerns about the lack of explanation in the manual regarding the problems you may experience trying to set the thing up, but Philips claims the toll-free hotline should be able to get most people out of trouble. To avoid frustration if you're thinking of buying one of these programmers, you might want to ring Philips first and ask if they know of any problems with your brand and model of video recorder. □

The 12th CHOICE Subscriber Draw

**For new subscriptions and renewals received
April 1 to June 30, 1994**

Subscriber draws are now held quarterly and on July 1 we'll be holding our twelfth. The lucky winner will be able to choose any two products from the following tests, published October 1993 to December 1993.



- ☐ Vacuum cleaners (October 1993)
- ☐ Multi-function electric wall ovens (October 1993 — sorry, the Simpson and Westinghouse models are not available.)
- ☐ Petrol lawnmowers (November 1993)
- ☐ Telephones (November 1993)
- ☐ Video game systems (December 1993)
- ☐ Small drinks coolers (December 1993)

These are products we bought for testing, so you won't be the first to turn them on or set them up. But we'll cover any service problems with a CHOICE warranty that'll match the manufacturers' — just as if you'd bought them new.

All new CHOICE subscriptions and renewals received from members and personal subscribers (including donors of gift subscriptions) by June 30 will go into the draw, unless of course you indicate you don't want to be included.

(If you're not due to renew your subscription during the period, don't worry, we'll be holding other draws during the year — your renewal notice will have the details. And if you're on a two-year subscription you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you renew again.)

 **Use the order form overleaf** 

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1. The winner will be drawn from new subscriptions and renewals from personal subscribers (including members and donors of gift subscriptions) received April 1 to June 30, 1994. If you opt for a two-year subscription, you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you actually renew or subscribe.
 2. Information on how to enter and prizes forms part of these conditions of entry.
 3. Employees, and their immediate families, of the Australian Consumers' Association and its associated companies and agencies are ineligible to enter.
 4. Entrants must be residents of Australia.
 5. Applications are subject to a verification check and the judge's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into.
 6. The prizes will be delivered free anywhere within Australia.
 7. Prizes cannot be taken as cash.
 8. South Australian residents may enter the draw by completing the form and posting to: Reply Paid No. 24, ACA, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, without subscribing to the magazine. Only one entry per person is permissible through this method.
 9. Last date for receipt of entries to the draw is June 30, 1994. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
 10. The draw will be conducted at the office of the Consumers' Association at 10 am on July 1, 1994.
 11. The winner will be notified by letter and published in the September 1994 issue of CHOICE magazine.
 12. The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
- NSW Permit No. TC94/0830, Vic Permit No. 94/578 issued on 28/2/94, ACT Permit No. TP94/0381 issued under the Lotteries Ordinance, NT No. NT94/0285.

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Consumer Information Service: (02) 559 98

For free help with a consumer problem, an update on past product tests.

Subscription Service: (02) 558 80
For enquiries about subscription or to order books from our Consumer Bookshelf.

Consumer Rights Advice

CHOICE operates consumer rights lines for people having problems with a faulty product or a dispute with a service person. The lines set out what your basic rights are and what steps you can take to protect them. These lines are also available in four languages other than English — Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese and Turkish.

CHOICE Consumer Rights Advice: 0055 200

Advice in Vietnamese: 0055 200

Advice in Turkish: 0055 200

Advice in Chinese: 0055 200

Advice in Arabic: 0055 200

Youth lines

A line specifically for young consumers, the 'Ripped-off' Line, outlines your shopping rights as well as letting you know what you can do if you run into problems with something you have bought.

Students can also call a resource line find out where to get up-to-date information on the consumer movement and the environment. These two topics are the most requested by students and teachers who ring our Consumer Information Service.

CHOICE 'Ripped-off' Line — Advice for Young Consumers: 0055 200

CHOICE Student Resource Guide: 0055 200

Product advice

A number of product lines also summarize what to look for when you are buying particular product. Brand-name recommendations aren't included, however — they remain exclusive to CHOICE subscribers.

CHOICE Washing Machine Advice: 0055 200

CHOICE Water Filter Advice: 0055 200

CHOICE Baby Products Advice: 0055 200

CHOICE Safer Domestic Pest Control Advice: 0055 200

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Address _____

Postcode _____

Gift card to read: To _____

From _____ Send gift renewal notice to me ☐ Yes ☐ No

Qty self	Qty gift	AMOUNT
☐ PERSONAL		@ \$48
☐ INSTITUTION		@ \$63
☐ PERSONAL		@ \$27
☐ INSTITUTION		@ \$33
☐ PERSONAL		@ \$27
☐ INSTITUTION		@ \$33
☐ RED		@ \$12
☐ GREEN		@ \$12
☐ BLUE		@ \$12
☐ RED		@ \$12
☐ BLACK		@ \$12
☐ GREY		@ \$12
TOTAL		

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JULY 1990 — JUNE 1994

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(T) Test (D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities

(U) Update of previous report * Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, or letters

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MAJOR APPLIANCES

ARE ALSO SUMMARISED

ON THE BACK COVER

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PÂTÉ

Since we tested pâté a few years ago, the industry appears to have lifted its game — to some extent. We found no disease-causing organisms, but in more than half the samples we tested, the conditions were favourable for pathogens to grow.

COMPARED WITH people in the UK and the US, Australians' consumption of smallgoods is low, but for pâté in particular, the Australian market is growing. Pâté is sold shelf-stable in tins and jars, or refrigerated — freshly cut from a block or in single-serve units prepacked by the manufacturer in moulded plastic. We decided to test this last type of pâté, as it's enjoying increasing popularity, especially for entertaining.

We bought two samples (with different use-by dates when we could find them) of three flavours from every brand that's available in at least two states. If you can't find your favourite brand of pâté in our table, it's probably because it's sold only in one state or isn't available in single-serve units. That gave us 10 brands, 30 flavours and 60 samples to test.

PROBLEMS IN THE PAST

When we first reported seven years ago on 14 samples of pâté bought in Sydney, we found 11 with unacceptably high levels of bacterial contamination, including six with disease-causing micro-organisms, or pathogens. These pathogens (such as *E. coli*, salmonella and *Staphylococcus aureus*) can cause food poisoning. Another, *Listeria monocytogenes*, can also cause miscarriage, meningitis, pneumonia and conjunctivitis. Pregnant

women, infants, elderly people and anyone with a weakened immune system are particularly at risk.

In a further test one year later, only two samples contained pathogens, but still 10 out of 28 samples tested had too many bacteria.

Since those last tests we've received several subscriber inquiries, all asking: "Is pâté safe yet?" Some manufacturers we contacted for this test claimed the industry had "lifted its game" and said they hoped our test would reflect this change. We hoped so too!

Pâté by its nature (see *The perfect environment for bacteria* overleaf) is likely to contain lots of bacteria. These aren't necessarily harmful in themselves, but large numbers of them indicate that conditions in the pâté are ripe for a large range of organisms to multiply — including many that *can* cause illness — and limits have therefore been set on the overall number of organisms allowed in pâté. We tested for this overall level, as well as for the specific pathogens mentioned earlier.

STILL ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Compared with the results from our previous tests, the quality of pâté has improved; none of the samples we tested contained any pathogens. However, only three of the 10 brands returned problem-

free results for *all* of their tested samples: LA BELLE PÂTÉ, REGAL and RUBENS.

In contrast, three other brands, DON DELI SUPREME, TASMANIAN and MARGARET'S KITCHEN, didn't have a single problem-free sample — though we'd emphasise again that we didn't find any disease-causing organisms. Their pâté had too many bacteria overall, contained coliforms or listeria bacteria or both or had high yeast and/or mould levels, though none was visibly spoiled on purchase. The table overleaf gives more details.

Four other manufacturers' pâtés (COPPER POT, JEAN PIERRE, MAISON PÂTÉ and STRABOUT) had a mixture of OK and not OK samples.

These test results confirm the industry has lifted its game to a certain extent. As we didn't detect any of the four pathogens we looked for, the most serious health risk pâté has posed in the past seems to be under control (while we found the listeria species in general present in some samples, we didn't find the specific pathogen *Listeria monocytogenes*). However, because of the presence of organisms like coliforms and listeria species, which indicate favourable conditions for pathogens to grow, people at risk might want to think twice before they eat pâté.

Most of the problems we found could have been caused anywhere from the

WHAT IS PÂTÉ?

PÂTÉ IS A FINE PASTE — traditionally made from a variety of meats, poultry or fish — and may be flavoured with vegetables, herbs, spices, fruit, wine, spirits or liqueurs. It originated in France as savoury pie, or *pâté en croute*. The traditional French *pâté de foie gras* is made (somewhat controversially these days) from livers of specially fattened geese and ducks. Apart from the seafood-based pâtés, most types we tested were based on chicken liver.

Similar spreads are available under different names. Coarser spreads are known as *terrines*, from the earthenware dish they're traditionally cooked in. *Liverwurst* usually contains less liver than pâté and therefore has a lower iron content. It's generally based on pork and pork liver and flavoured with a variety of herbs and spices.





The pâtés we tested — we found no problems with any of the samples from La Belle Pâté, Regal or Rubens.

production line through transport and storage to when they were on the retail outlet shelf.

Even if strict hygiene regulations are followed at the place of manufacture and the pâté leaves it with a 'clean slate', there are many more opportunities for spoilage before it reaches the consumer. During transport to and storage at the retail outlet, pâté must be kept under refrigeration. A temperature of 4°C or lower is necessary to retard growth of most harmful bacteria, which can multiply very rapidly at normal room temperature. Prompt transfer from the retail outlet to the home refrigerator and proper storage temperatures there are also important.

We can't assign blame to manufacturers, retailers or even your own storage methods; we can just point out that sometimes, and particularly for some people, eating pâté has the potential to be a health risk.

THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR BACTERIA

Pâté is by nature very vulnerable to bacterial contamination. First, bacteria thrive in high-protein foods such as liver and other meats, which form the basis of many pâtés. Second, the liver and other meats are sometimes only partially cooked; and third, the mincing process which follows exposes a large surface area for any bacteria present to grow on.

Most single-serve pâté is filled into its container, decorated and sealed; these handling procedures after cooking further increase the risk of contamination. RUBENS, one of the manufacturers whose pâté samples were all problem-free and didn't contain preservatives, told us its pâté is cooked at the last stage of production — in the sealed container — to reduce this risk.

Some manufacturers add preservatives to meat-based pâté to overcome some of the spoilage problems — the table lists which ones. Some asthmatics may be sensitive to some of these preservatives. If you are, check the label or refer to our table.

SHelf-LIFE

We tested the pâtés about a week before their stipulated use-by date. Our results show some had already reached the end of their acceptable shelf-life — that is, they already contained a high level of bacteria. They may have been exposed to

too high temperatures at an earlier stage — we had transported them under refrigeration to the testing laboratory.

Once opened and out of the fridge, pâté should ideally be consumed straightaway. Leftovers should be wrapped in plastic film and stored in the fridge, away from any uncovered dairy products or raw chicken. Most manufacturers recommend using pâté within five days once opened, though suggestions vary from two days to seven. Factors such as the condition of your fridge, its temperature, and where pâté is stored among other food all influence its shelf-life. □

NEW STANDARD FOR LESS MEAT ... BUT MORE LABEL INFORMATION

AT PRESENT, manufacturers of meat-based pâté have to comply with the Australian Food Standard for 'manufactured meat', which stipulates a meat content of at least 66%. The actual amount of meat does not have to be declared on the label. The National Food Authority recently drafted a revised standard for processed meat products, which are to contain between 30% and 66% meat. Other regulations currently applying to manufactured meat — concerning micro-organisms, for example — will also apply to processed meat. The revised standard is now being discussed at ministerial level and is expected to be adopted later this year.

For this new category of processed meat products, manufacturers will have two labelling options. They may choose to state on the label the maximum total fat content (from all sources) and the minimum fat-free meat content. Or they

may choose the alternative option and only declare the minimum total meat content (as a percentage). If they opt for the latter, consumers will still be left in the dark about the percentage of offal, blood and fat that may be included in the meat content. However, offal or blood will have to be listed separately in the ingredients, if present.

We're concerned that the introduction of this revised standard may lead over time to a lowering of meat content in such products, if as little as 30% meat will suffice for the product to fit into the processed meat category. If you want to avoid buying pâté low in meat in the future, remember that 'manufactured' should be meatier. We're hoping that manufacturers of these meat products will better inform consumers by providing information on both the fat and the meat content of their products.

Pâté

Brand	Manufacturer	Type	Net weight (g)	Price range (\$)	Preservatives listed	Standard plate count too high	Past acceptable shelf-life	High yeast level	High mould level	Coliforms present	Listeria species present
All the samples we tested from the brand were OK (in alphabetical order)						✕ = one sample affected; ✕, ✕ = two samples affected					
La Belle Pâté	Wintulichs	Mushroom and port	125	1.60–1.90	223						
		Grand Marnier	125	1.60–1.90	223						
		Peppercorn and brandy	125	1.60–1.90	223						
Regal	Regal Pâté	Green peppercorn	150	1.95–2.95							
		Chicken and brandy	150	1.95–2.95							
		Grand Marnier	150	1.95–2.95							
Rubens	Rubens Fine Foods	Red salmon mousse	100	1.65–2.25							
		Duck à l'orange	100	1.65–2.25							
		Black pepper with cognac	100	1.65–2.25							
Some of the brand's samples were OK, some not (in alphabetical order)											
Copper Pot	Copper Pot Pâté	French onion and bacon	125	1.40–1.95	223						
		Duck liver and port	125	1.40–1.95	223	✕, ✕					
		Grand Marnier	125	1.40–1.95	223	✕	✕			✕	✕
Jean Pierre	Jean Pierre Pâté	Salmon mousse	125	2.50–3.00	200					✕	✕
		Cracked pepper	125	2.50–3.00	223		✕		✕		
		Orange liqueur	125	2.50–3.00	223					✕	
Maison Pâté	Maison Pâté	Chicken green peppercorn	100	1.90–2.40	223					✕	✕
		Chicken Grand Marnier	100	1.90–2.40	223						✕
		Smoked salmon	100	2.20–2.90			✕		✕		
Stirabout	Corata	Pâté with pecan and port	125	2.60	223	✕					
		Pâté with Grand Marnier	125	2.60	223	✕	✕	✕		✕	
		Pâté with smoked salmon	125	3.00		✕, ✕		✕, ✕		✕, ✕	✕
None of the samples we tested from the brand was OK (in alphabetical order)											
Don Deli Supreme	Don Smallgoods	Shrimp and crabmeat	125	1.85–2.15		✕				✕	✕
		Orange and Grand Marnier	125	1.85–2.15	223	✕, ✕		✕		✕, ✕	
		Cracked pepper	125	1.85–2.15	223	✕	✕	✕		✕	✕, ✕
Margaret's Kitchen	Margaret's Kitchen	Pâté de foie	100	1.75–2.45		✕, ✕		✕			
		Orange Grand Marnier	125	1.75–2.45		✕, ✕		✕, ✕		✕	
		Cracked black pepper	100	1.75–2.45		✕, ✕		✕, ✕		✕	
Tasmanian	Le Traiteur	Venison and red wine	125	2.40–2.85	220, 250		✕	✕		✕, ✕	✕, ✕
		Smoked salmon malagasy	125	2.55–3.00		✕	✕	✕, ✕			✕
		Cracked peppercorn	125	2.40–2.85	220, 250	✕			✕	✕, ✕	✕, ✕

1 Preservatives

If you're concerned about preservative content, check the label or refer to this table. **223** = sodium metabisulphite, **220** = sulphur dioxide, **250** = sodium nitrite, **200** = sorbic acid

PROBLEMS

We tested two samples of each flavour and often found different problems in different samples of the same pâté. **x** indicates the problem was found in one sample, **x, x** in both samples. We found no pathogens (disease-causing organisms), which is an improvement on our 1987 and '88 tests and indicates manufacturers have improved their processes.

2 Standard plate count (SPC)

A 'standard plate count' determines the overall number of bacteria in a product. It does not distinguish between types of bacteria.

Pâté manufacturers have to comply with the Australian Food Standards Code, which prescribes that four out of five 100 g samples contain no more than one million (10^6) micro-organisms per gram and the remaining sample not more than 10^7 . For our tests we considered an SPC of more than 10^6 micro-organisms per gram unacceptable.

3 Past acceptable shelf life

If we found more than 100 000 (10^5) organisms per gram in a standard plate count *plus* any other problem (high mould or yeast levels, coliforms or listeria), we considered the pâté sample unacceptable — its shelf life had been overestimated or it had been stored or handled inappropriately, and it would go off very soon.

4 High yeast level

High yeast levels indicate contamination

at any stage after the ingredients have been cooked. Pâté with high yeast levels is more likely to go off soon and develop an unpleasant taste or smell.

5 High mould level

High mould levels also indicate contamination at a post-processing stage or an inadequate packaging system. Mouldy foods should not be eaten, as the mould (fungi) can produce toxins, which can affect the liver and the nervous system.

6 Coliforms and listeria species

The presence of coliforms or listeria bacteria can indicate contamination at the processing or post-processing level. We didn't find the pathogen *Listeria monocytogenes* in any sample.

Selling your home



Whether you sell through an agent or on your own it's important to know what you're letting yourself in for.

IF YOU'RE A HOME OWNER, some time or other you'll probably want to sell it. However, unless you're into property speculation you don't want to do it too often; it's not cheap.

This article examines different ways of selling your home. It doesn't aim to cover the ins and outs of things you have little choice about, such as conveyancing and other legal obligations, but to present and examine some of your options when selling.

The first steps

Unless you're very good at financial games, try not to commit yourself to buying anything else until you've sold your existing home. You could land yourself in financial hot water if you can't subsequently sell your place, or even if there's a delay in selling or a drop in prices. Try not to make a firm offer on a new home until you've accepted one on your present one. It could still fall through but you have more chance of avoiding financial hassles.

You'll also need to do some work before you start talking to real estate agents or placing ads. You might be able to add a few thousand dollars to the house's value by making sure it looks its best for public inspections: mow the lawn, get rid of those weeds in the garden, fix up the fence, shampoo the carpets, clean up the junk lying around, put

some fresh flowers in the vase. If the outside of the house looks shabby this may put a lot of people off buying, so consider a new coat of paint. However, weigh up the likely cost effectiveness of any improvement. If you think spending \$300 or \$400 will add \$1000 to the price, do it, but if you're going to spend \$900 to perhaps add \$1000 the effort and expense probably aren't worth it.

If you don't want to rely on a real estate agent's estimation of your home's value, you could get it officially valued: check the *Yellow Pages* under 'Valuers—real estate'. However, this is likely to cost a few hundred dollars. You could come up with a reasonable estimate yourself by looking at other recent sale prices in your area and visiting 'open houses' to compare them and the price they're selling for with yours. You could also ask several agents for an estimate of value and see which ones coincide.

You can either engage a real estate agent to sell your home or do it yourself. The advantages of each are described in *Going it alone* and *Paying an agent*, below. There are also two different ways of selling your home:

■ **Direct sale**, where you advertise for a specific price and then negotiate with buyers. You can go it alone with this method or use an agent.

An advantage is that potential buyers have a good idea of what price to expect

so your time isn't wasted with people looking for something much cheaper. You also have more control over the sale than with an auction. For example, you may prefer to sell to the family who wants to live there rather than the investor whose plans are unclear. If your house is a particularly 'desirable property', direct sale can also be quicker than waiting for an auction.

■ **Auction**: you set a 'reserve price' on your property and, provided someone makes a bid above that price, you agree to sell it to whoever makes the highest bid. It would be very unusual to 'go it alone' and hold an auction—paying for it would probably negate all the cost savings you hoped to make.

There are two major advantages of an auction. You can pit prospective buyers against each other rather than against you, so if two or more people are interested in the property you could get a better price than from a direct sale. Also, it's a firm contract on the fall of the hammer—you don't have to wait for the buyer to sell their own home. The disadvantage is that attracting rival bidders may only happen in reality if your house has some distinctive character that makes it attractive to someone willing to buy at any price. You should think twice about agreeing to auction if there is nothing special or particularly desirable about your property. You could end up

paying a lot of money to stage the auction and find no serious bidders turn up.

Unless you're confident your home has that something extra that will have people clamouring to pay top dollar at auction, you'll probably be better off trying to sell it directly. In Victoria, where auctions are much more common, you might be more inclined to try this method simply because buyers are used to it.

Paying an agent

By far the most common way to sell your home is to use a real estate agent (also called land agents). The advantage of doing it this way is that a good agent is in contact with a number of buyers and sellers, so should be able to direct an appropriate buyer your way and hence sell the place faster than you could on your own. Agents may also help to arrange the tricky details involved in selling your home, such as conveyancing and other legal requirements.

The poor reputation of real estate agents isn't entirely warranted. A CHOICE survey a few years ago found a quarter of people selling their home would not use the same agent again, but the other three quarters considered their advice 'adequate'. A number of the letters we received complained about the behaviour of the first agent tried but went on to say the second agent was fine. It's well worth asking around friends and relatives who've had dealings with estate agents to get an idea of who to avoid and who is genuinely helpful.

The disadvantage of using agents is the cost. For an average house you'll pay \$3000 to \$6000 commission to the agent, depending on where you live (see *Real estate commissions* overleaf), plus you'll probably be hit by advertising and other costs as well, which could easily be a thousand dollars or more out of your pocket.

In theory you should be able to negotiate the agent's commission. The figures quoted by agents are usually the *maximum* they can charge. A survey by the Prices Surveillance Authority at the beginning of 1992 found in 80% to 90% of sales the maximum commission was the one actually charged (although in South Australia, where the maximum commission is a bit higher, discounts were offered in around half of all sales).

A mini-survey conducted by CHOICE found only one out of 22 agents around the country who would reduce the commission if the owner wanted to negotiate. Others said they would consider reducing their commission if the property sold quickly or was close to being sold and

they thought a reduced commission would clinch the deal. But most were unwilling to reduce their commissions for the average person.

The commission often doesn't include costs such as advertising, producing a sign, photos, brochures to hand out to prospective clients, etc. Roughly a quarter of the agents in our mini-survey did include advertising costs in their commission. The rest typically said it would cost the seller \$400 to \$600 on top of the commission. Around half the agents included other costs such as photos, signs and brochures in the commission. Those who didn't said they would add a fee of another \$100 to \$200. Some agents who said these charges were included in the commission reserved the right to charge the customer if the sale fell through.

If you don't feel up to trying to negotiate the commission you can at least compare what you get for it. Approach

Approach a number of agents in the area and make it clear you're asking around. Ask each to specify a marketing plan, showing what they would do to earn their money.

a number of agents in the area and make it clear you're asking around. Ask each to specify a marketing plan, showing what they would do to earn their money. Ask what extras you have to pay on top of the commission, such as advertising costs; they may be willing to knock a bit off these costs. Alternatively, you might try proposing a different form of fee such as a flat fee plus a significant percentage of anything above the valued price. This can only really work in a deregulated market (see *Deregulation*, overleaf).

Whatever arrangement ultimately seems best to you, make sure it is detailed in the written agency agreement. You wouldn't want to discover a memory lapse when it comes to bill-paying time.

Going it alone

While virtually everyone uses a real estate agent when selling their home, it is possible to do it yourself and so save money by not paying an agent's commission. It will probably take longer than it would with an agent, so if you're in a hurry to make the sale it may not be a good idea.

The important thing is to be professional about it. When you advertise your home, make sure someone is around to answer the phone. Get some brochures made up, detailing features of the house,

distances to shops, transport, etc, a floorplan and a photo (if you have access to modern desktop publishing you may be able to do this quite well yourself, or you could go to an instant print/design company). Give the brochures away to people who come to see the house.

It's worth having a look beforehand at other places being sold privately and through agents to get a feel for the sort of presentation that's normal, as well as prices.

An argument used by real estate agents against private sales is that a thief can use an inspection to "case the joint and leave a window open". As far as possible keep anything valuable hidden during inspections and try not to let people out of your sight while they're viewing. Check windows and doors at the end of the inspection.

When you're ready to finalise the sale you need to go through the process of **conveyancing**. This is the legal process of transferring the title of the property from your name to the buyer's. (In NSW the contract must be drawn up before you put the property on the market.) It is possible to do this yourself too, and there are various kits around that guide you through the process. Look in the *Yellow Pages* under 'Conveyancing services' for these kits as well as for people who will do the conveyancing for you.

A Melbourne reader wrote to us praising the kit he used: "Our biggest problem was the initial lack of confidence. We did not have the 'safety net' in the form of a member of the legal profession standing behind us. In recalling how flimsy and ineffective that net was with our first real estate transaction, and how competent the authors of the kit appeared to be, we gradually shed our apprehension."

A Sydney reader mentioned a couple of problems he experienced trying to sell privately. "Potential buyers were a bit reluctant to make frank comments on price for fear of offending", and more irritating were "endless phone calls from agents despite explicit statements in the adverts 'no agents'". Sometimes they phoned just leaving a name and number, obviously counting on you returning the call, assuming they are a private buyer."

The savings, however, can be very significant. A NSW reader sold his house privately after just two ads, which together cost \$130. "An agent may have been able to negotiate a better sale price, but no more than an extra \$2000 which would have disappeared into his fee."

There are also firms that help you sell

REAL ESTATE COMMISSIONS

The governments of Queensland, Victoria and WA have legislation fixing the maximum commissions real estate agents can charge. In the ACT and SA the local Real Estate Institute has a set of maximum commissions that its members (virtually all real estate agents) must not exceed.

According to a Prices Surveillance Authority inquiry in 1992, virtually all real estate agents in these states, except SA, charge the maximum commission, so that is the figure in the table. In SA around half of all sales are discounted by 20% to 30%. We have still included the maximum commissions in this table, but you should definitely try to get a discount if you live in that state.

In NSW, the NT and Tasmania maximum commissions have fallen by the wayside. The Real Estate Institute of Tasmania has a list of recommended commissions which is the basis for the figures in our table, while the Real Estate Institutes of NSW and

the NT let their members charge what they like. The figures included for NSW and the Territory are the maximum that applied up to deregulation; they should be used as a guide only.

House price:	\$100 000	\$150 000	\$200 000	\$250 000
ACT	4000	5500	6750	8000
NSW	3100	4100	5100	6100
NT	3700	5200	6700	8200
Queensland	2950	4200	5450	6700
SA	4340	5940	7540	9140
Tasmania	3185	4310	5435	6560
Victoria	2660	3660	4660	5660
WA	3875	5125	6250	7375

DEREGULATION

THE PRICES SURVEILLANCE AUTHORITY (PSA) in its 1992 report said the current structure for setting real estate agents' commissions has been determined arbitrarily and has little or no relation to the actual costs of providing the service. It tentatively supported price deregulation provided certain conditions were met, including independent monitoring of commissions and fees, and requirements for the agent to provide information to clients about the service to be provided, likely commissions and fees and the fact that they are negotiable, among others.

The PSA said one reason real estate agents don't like to reduce their commissions is because it rarely has an effect on whether they make a sale or not. Other local firms could match the reductions fairly easily, so ultimately they wouldn't gain any business and their income would drop. If prices were deregulated there is no reason this would change. In fact it might explain why prices increased significantly after deregulation in New Zealand. Our sister magazine in NZ, *Consumer*, found agents' commissions rose nearly 90% in the three years following deregulation — well over double the inflation rate of around 35% for the three-year period — and since then fees have continued to rise above inflation.

In NSW, where deregulation has been in effect for a year or so, commissions haven't changed significantly, although they have tended to increase on lower-priced properties and decrease on the higher-priced ones — but it's early days yet. Other states are looking on with interest.

your home without an agent. They are not real estate agents and make it clear they won't sell your home; you have to do that yourself. But they will provide background information and support. Typically you can expect a professionally designed sign and brochures to give out to people, a kit that gives tips on wording advertisements, negotiating with buyers, etc., and a guide to real estate prices in your area to help you set your price. Depending on the package you buy, the company might also field calls from prospective buyers, give you a professional valuation and legal help with the conveyancing.

The fees for these firms are in the vicinity of \$800 to \$1600 — much cheaper than an agent's commission — and typically you'll pay a proportion of that fee upfront and the rest when the property is sold. We know of two such firms, ANREPS and Private Vendor Consultants; if you're interested, check to see if they operate in your area. You may be able to find others in the 'Property consultants' section of the Yellow Pages, but it covers other sorts of property consultant as well.

In NSW, the Law Consumers Association provides a kit for \$145 which consists of signs, a report on market prices and a booklet explaining how to go about selling your home on your own. If there are others we'd be happy to hear about them.

Exclusive or open?

There are three different sorts of contract you can sign with an agent:

■ An exclusive agency agreement means that for a period of time the agent is the only one allowed to sell your home, and even if you come to some sort of arrangement with someone who wasn't introduced by the agent you will still have to

pay a full commission. Real estate agents say this is the best sort of agreement because they "will be working flat out for you in that time". The downside is it binds you to that single agent. In some cases you can have an exclusive agreement where you are still allowed to sell the place privately *without* paying commission to the agent. This is usually called a sole agency agreement, although the distinction between the two terms isn't always clear. Make sure it is clearly stated in any contract you sign.

■ An open listing is where more than one agent can sell the property. Not all agents offer this sort of agreement, and those who do may not put as much effort or expense into marketing your property because they can't be sure their efforts will result in a sale for themselves and hence a commission.

■ Multilisting is where agents pool their listings so buyers can go into their local real estate agent and find out about houses in other areas. It's apparently the most popular way of selling by far in the US. Agents in Australia say it's the best option when there's nothing particularly distinctive about the property and you want to spread your net a bit wider. A disadvantage of multilisting contracts is that they often contain an exclusive clause, so even if you sell the property yourself you may have to pay a commission to the agent.

If there's a dominant agency in your area consider an exclusive agreement with them because they'll probably be the one to sell it anyway. If there's no clear leader try for a multilisting or open agreement with the ones you think are best. □

CONSUMER BOOKSHELF

CHOICE BOOKS

NEW

IN TRANSITION A Guide to Menopause

Dr Deborah Saltman

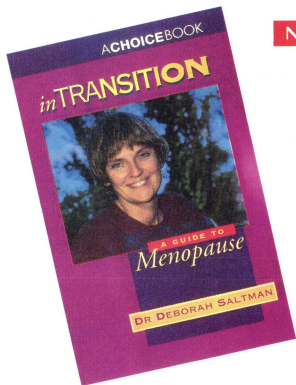
In Transition covers the topics surrounding menopause in an easily understood, non-patronising way. Topics include:

- your relationship with your doctor
- what is hormone replacement therapy and can it help you?
- the basics of the female reproductive system
- contraception and reproduction over age 40
- examinations and tests — what you should expect from them
- facts about related medical questions — such as osteoporosis, cancer, heart disease, incontinence and prolapse
- conventional *and* alternative strategies for dealing with problems
- and in general, how to cope with uncertainty and a changing medical perspective.

Dr Deborah Saltman is Associate Professor of General Practice, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney. She has written a book on menopause that will be welcomed by many women for giving them the facts without talking down to them.

\$18 paperback 184 pp

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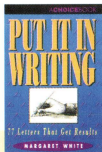


FACEFACTS A Guide to Cosmetics, Skin and Hair Care

Beauty choices for the discerning cosmetics purchaser. *Facefacts* guides you through the thickets of advertising claims and distinguishes the hype from the hard facts, explaining phrases like 'hypoallergenic', 'comedogenic' and that old chesnut, 'natural'. It looks at many issues including testing on animals, how the sun damages your skin, and how best to protect it.

\$18 paperback 240 pp

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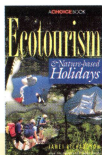


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DR JOHN IRVINE

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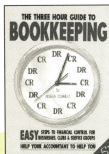
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Skills for Understanding and Being Understood

Krista Cole

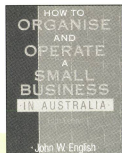
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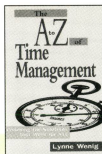
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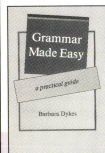
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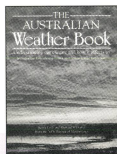
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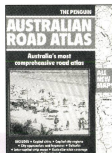
GRAMMAR MADE EASY
Grammar — it's back in fashion. This is a book to help you improve your grammar or explain it to your child. Through a series of simple step-by-step exercises it looks at parts of speech, punctuation, and common mistakes.
17 paperback 188 pp

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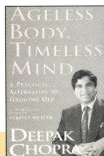
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\$20 paperback 175 pp

Code: AWB



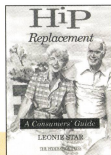
THE PENGUIN AUSTRALIAN ROAD ATLAS
A comprehensive Australia-wide road guide. It includes 129 maps, including capital city maps, regional maps, and approach and bypass routes for each state capital.
\$20 paperback 162 pp

Code: PARA



AGELESS BODY, TIMELESS MIND
Aging inevitable? Drawing on both Ayurvedic and western medicine, Dr Deepak Chopra examines this question by considering the interaction of mind and body processes. This book combines understandable theory, inspiring case studies and practical exercises to determine to what extent we can reshape and control the aging process.
20 paperback 342 pp

Code: ABTM



HIP REPLACEMENT — A CONSUMERS' GUIDE
In 1991 Leonie Star had her right hip replaced. After the operation she realised how little information was available for consumers on this topic. This very practical book is the result. It includes details on preparing for the operation and your return home, the procedure itself and a list of do's and don'ts.
\$20 paperback 88 pp

Code: HRCG



STUCK FOR WORDS
What to say to someone who is grieving
When someone dies you never know what to say to those left behind. *Stuck For Words* is a practical guide to grief that explains why people need to grieve and how to help those grieving. It includes exercises and case histories.
\$15 paperback 136 pp

Code: SFW

THE BIG SCREEN

They're big, they're black, but are they beautiful?

We took a look at eight large-screen, stereo-sound televisions and found that a large price tag doesn't always guarantee big performance.

THE DEMAND FOR TELEVISIONS with a large screen has steadily grown over the last few years. It was estimated in 1993 that screen sizes in excess of 64 cm accounted for around 11% of televisions sold in Australia which, taking into account their four-figure price tags, amounts to a considerable sum being spent by consumers.

The last time we watched televisions was April 1993, when we looked at the other end of the market, testing 15 portable 34 cm models. For this issue's test we looked at 68 cm models, the most popular screen size for large televisions. We also specified that the sets have stereo sound capability and a selling price of \$2000 or less. This gave us eight models to put through their paces.

A ROOM WITH A VIEWING DISTANCE

These televisions are not for small rooms. The diagonal screen size on all the models was measured as conforming to the claimed 68 cm. This gives a screen

which is about 55 cm wide and 41 cm high and a picture tube that goes back about half a metre. Add on room for two sets of speakers and you get quite an imposing piece of furniture. It's generally recommended that you view a television set from at least six times the screen height. With these models that totals at around two and a half metres. To get the most out of these sets you'll need to have a room that can easily accommodate the dimensions.

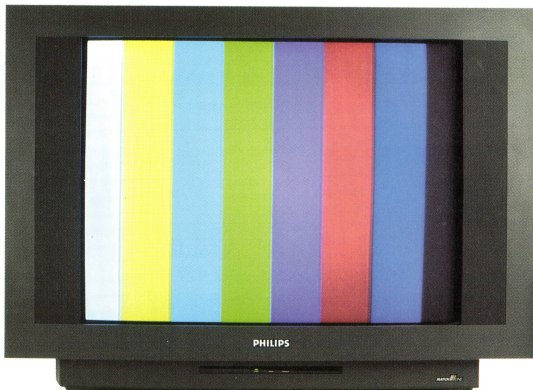
PICTURE QUALITY

We asked a panel of 15 to view each set under controlled conditions and rate the quality of the picture. While most models were to the panel's liking, the TELEFUNKEN was consistently scored low. It has a picture that is noticeably lacking in sharpness and, even when it's not directly compared to the other models, looks blurred and slightly out of focus, lacking in detail and clarity. When our panellists were asked if they would consider buy-

ing this set based on its picture quality, only one person said they would. The other 14 said they were 'unlikely to' or would 'definitely not' consider buying this model. This lack of picture quality is not good enough in a television priced at almost \$2000, so the TELEFUNKEN is not recommended.

In contrast, the picture quality of both the SANYO and MITSUBISHI was very well liked by our viewing panel because of the sharp, clear image and good colour reproduction. All our panellists said they would consider buying the SANYO and only one person said they be would be unlikely to consider the MITSUBISHI.

Not for the first time, a SONY model polarised our panel when it came to picture quality. When the panel's scores were averaged the picture quality came out as 'good', but individual scores rated it both high and low, so the average isn't really representative. The TV has a very sharp, detailed picture but, while five



You need a large enough room to accommodate these TVs as a piece of furniture, as well as to give you enough viewing distance.



panellists said they would 'definitely' consider buying this model, two said they would 'definitely not'. We'd suggest you look at the picture on this model yourself to see if you like the super-sharp-ness.

SOUNDS GOOD?

Many television shows are now being broadcast with stereo soundtracks. All the models we tested had receivers and speakers which could decode and play this stereo sound. We carried out an expert subjective assessment of the quality of sound obtainable through the amplifier and speakers that are built into each model. We listened to a selection of music on each set and adjusted the tone controls to give the best sound the sets could produce.

The PHILIPS stood out as having the best audio of the models tested. It had a good, balanced sound with smooth bass, good treble and a good volume range. Its sound quality couldn't be classed as 'hifi' but it gave the sort of quality you would expect from an average budget-priced 'midi' stereo system.

The MITSUBISHI and SANYO were both a little disappointing in the listening test and suffered particularly in the bass area. The resulting sound quality lacked depth and clarity but was still better than that normally associated with televisions.

All the models have connections to allow them to be plugged into a stereo system. We tested the quality of the signal produced from these audio line outputs and found that they all performed well in this area, although the NEC did not reproduce high-pitched sounds as well as the others.

REMOTE CONTROL

The range of functions offered on the remote controls for all the models is fairly extensive. With all of them you can alter the picture and sound settings as well as do the usual things like adjust the volume and change channel.

Regardless of what a remote control can do, it should be easy to use, with well laid out and clearly marked buttons. The remote controls for all the models are quite large, with a daunting array of buttons, but some are better designed for everyday use. We assessed how easy each remote is to use by looking at the way certain common tasks were performed — see *Ease of use score*, on page 41.

The easiest to use remote is the one supplied with the PHILIPS. It provides a similar level of features to the others but is particularly well laid out and clearly marked. While some buttons are housed under a flip-up panel, the main controls

are directly accessible and easy to find and use.

When looking to buy a television, always take a little time and play with the remote in the shop. Go through all the normal things you'd do with a remote like adjusting the volume and changing channels. Try changing the channel from two to 10 and then back to two with the number keys to see how the remote handles single and double digits. If you find you can't figure out how to do the basics or you have trouble finding the volume buttons each time you want to use them, the remote is not very well designed and might be a source of annoyance if you buy the set.

INSTRUCTIONS

Poorly written and cryptic instruction manuals can be a source of frustration when trying to come to grips with a newly acquired appliance. These televisions have a myriad features so it's important the instructions can successfully explain and guide you through the use of them as well as unravel the mysteries of channel tuning and connection of a video recorder.

Unfortunately, the instructions supplied with the TELEFUNKEN left quite a bit to be desired. The text is written in 'German' English and is, at best, confusing to read. They would do well to take a leaf out of the excellent MITSUBISHI instruction manual, which gives comprehensive coverage of all topics, is well written and illustrated and presents the information in a format that's easy to find and use.

WHAT TO BUY

PHILIPS 29SX8671	\$2000
SONY KV-2966AS	\$2000
MITSUBISHI CT-29AB1	\$1750
equal PANASONIC TC-29V26A	\$1950
SAMSUNG CB-7230WT	\$1650

Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in March 1994.

The PHILIPS scored best overall because of its very good remote control and good sound quality. Its picture quality was reasonably well liked by our viewing panel but it did not produce quite as sharp and clear an image as some of the other models.

The SANYO had the best picture quality of any of the sets tested but did not make it onto our *What to buy* list because of its lacklustre sound and a low ease of use rating, due to a fairly complex and confusing remote control.

As we said earlier, check whether you like the SONY's extra-sharp picture, which polarised our viewing panel's opinions.

HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

We asked our panel of subscribers who report on the reliability of appliances if their TV had needed repair in the last 12 months. The results are given below for the most popular brands. The number in brackets is the number of sets of the particular brand in the survey. On average, just over 10% of all TVs in the survey needed repair in that time, and the average cost of repairs was about \$86. Note that the results of the survey are for TVs of all types and sizes, not for the models included in our test.

Brand (sample size)	% not needing repair
NEC (235)	97
Panasonic (547)	95
Toshiba (193)	95
AWA (265)	93
Hitachi (73)	93
JVC (74)	93
Sharp (269)	91
Sony (256)	91
Mitsubishi (97)	88
Akai (128)	85
Samsung (60)	85
Sanyo (261)	85
Philips (592)	80

When we asked our panellists if they'd buy the same brand of TV again, we got the following responses:

Brand	% who would buy again
JVC	97
Hitachi	96
Panasonic	96
Sony	95
Sharp	94
Philips	93
Toshiba	93
NEC	92
AWA	91
Sanyo	91
Mitsubishi	90
Samsung	87
Akai	86

CONSCIENTIOUS TV REPAIR





Remote controls pictured 40% of actual size.



Profiles

The models are listed in rank order. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in March 1994.

PHILIPS 29SX8671

Target price: \$2000

Good points

- Best picture quality with technical test patterns.
- Best overall sound quality.
- Easiest to use overall.
- Best remote control — well labelled and logically laid out.
- Easy to understand channel tuning procedure.
- Good instructions.
- Headphone socket.

Bad points

- Cannot add external speakers to replace the internal ones.

Remote control

Large remote but the main controls are easy to access, well labelled and well laid out. There is a small flip-open lid covering the teletext, surround sound and personal preference buttons, but this was easy to open and did not cause any problems.

SONY KV-2966AS

Target price: \$2000

Good points

- Reasonably well liked picture quality on average, though the panel's opinions tended to polarise. Check it out yourself.
- Good overall sound quality
- Generally easy to use remote control.
- Full auto-tuning.
- Offers a two-year parts and labour warranty.

Bad points

- No personal preference memories.
- No headphone socket.
- Cannot add external speakers to replace the internal ones.

Remote control

Smallest of the remote controls tested but has similar features to the others. It was generally easy to use, with well marked controls, but some of the buttons were a little small and the layout was slightly cramped.

MITSUBISHI CT-29AB1

Target price: \$1750

Good points

- Well liked picture quality — equal first in viewing panel results.
- Generally easy to use remote control.
- Best instructions.
- Full auto-tuning.
- Multiple picture and sound preference setting memories.
- Headphone socket.

Bad points

- Not very well liked sound in subjective listening test.
- Cannot add external speakers to replace the internal ones.

Remote control

A large remote control with a slide-down lid covering some buttons, including the picture and sound setting controls. The channel and volume controls were not under the lid and were well marked and easily accessible. When the lid was slid into its open position, the remote was awkward to hold and manipulate. There are buttons on the remote to control two Mitsubishi video recorders at once.

PANASONIC TC-29V26A

Target price: \$1950

Good points

- Reasonably well liked picture quality.
- Full auto-tuning.
- Good instructions.
- Multiple picture and sound preference setting memories.
- Headphone socket.

Bad points

- Cannot add external speakers to replace the internal ones.

Remote control

A large remote with all buttons directly accessible. The labelling and layout were reasonable but the selection of double-digit channel numbers was a little tedious. There are buttons on the remote to control a Panasonic video recorder.



SAMSUNG CB-7230WT

Target price: \$1650

Good points

Good overall sound quality
Can connect external speakers to replace internal ones.
Offers three-year parts and labour warranty.

Bad points

Remote control is not very easy to use.

No headphone socket.

Remote control

Large remote control with a flip-down lid covering some buttons, including the picture and sound controls. The channel and volume controls were not under the lid and were well marked and easily accessible. When the lid was lifted into its open position, the remote was awkward to hold and manipulate. The remote had to be switched between single and double-digit channel numbers, which was annoying in use.



NEC FS-6850S

Target price: \$1750

Good points

Headphone socket.
Can connect external speakers to replace internal ones.
Offers three-year parts and labour warranty.

Bad points

No personal preference memories.

Remote control

Medium-sized remote with reasonably well labelled controls. When selecting a single-digit channel number there was a slight pause while the TV waited for a second or so to see if a second digit was to be pressed. This could be a little annoying when quickly flicking between channels. This was the only remote which had keys available to control a variety of brands of video recorder. The remote allows you to cycle through a series of stored codes to find ones that work with yours.



SANYO CPP2930

Target price: \$1700

Good points

Well liked picture quality — equal first in viewing panel results and best overall picture quality.
Full auto-tuning.
Headphone socket.
Can connect external speakers to replace internal ones.

Bad points

Worst overall sound quality.
Confusingly marked remote control is not very easy to use.
No blank channel skip when using channel up or down buttons.
Worst for overall ease of use.

Remote control

Medium-sized remote control, which is confusingly marked and poorly laid out. All buttons are the same size and shape and there is no spacing of separate groups. This makes finding the button you want quite difficult. There are buttons on the remote to control a Sanyo video recorder.



NOT RECOMMENDED

TELEFUNKEN SDX290 H

Target price: \$1800

This TV is in our 'not recommended' category because for this price you should expect to get better quality.

Good points

Good overall sound quality
Headphone socket.
Can connect external speakers to replace internal ones.

Bad points

Worst overall picture quality, and least liked by the viewing panel.
Remote control confusing to use.
Difficult to understand instructions.
No direct way of stepping up or down channels.
No sound settings memory.
No picture sharpness control.

Remote control

Large remote control with relatively few buttons. The screen and button symbols are often unclear and confusing. There are no channel up or down buttons so the numeric keys must be used to change channels. Selecting double-digit channels was a little slow and tedious when flicking through the channels.

Large stereo televisions

Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price (\$)*	Warranty (years, parts and labour)	1	2	3	4	5	6
					Teletext	Full auto- tuning	Skip	Personal preference memories (picture/sound)	External speaker connection	Stereo enhancement effect
PHILIPS 29SX8671	Philips	Singapore	2000	1 (B)			✓	1 / 1		✓ (F)
SONY KV-2966AS	Sony	Malaysia	2000	2		✓	✓			✓
MITSUBISHI CT-29AB1	Mitsubishi	Singapore	1750	1		✓	✓	5 / 5		✓ (G)
PANASONIC TC-29V26A	Panasonic	Australia	1950	1 (C)		✓	✓	3 / 3		✓ (G)
SAMSUNG CB-7230WT	Samsung	Korea	1650	3	✓	✓	✓	1 / 1 (E)	✓	(G)
NEC FS-6850S	NEC	Australia (A)	1750	3			✓		✓	✓ (F), (G)
SANYO CPP2930	Sanyo	Japan	1700	1 (D)		✓		1 / 1 (E)	✓	✓
NOT RECOMMENDED										
TELEFUNKEN SDX290 H	M H Group	Singapore	1800	1	✓			1 / -	✓	✓

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in March 1994. Anything lower is a bargain.

(A) Assembled in Australia.

(B) Two years on the picture tube. Various extended warranty plans at further cost.

(C) Additional two years for \$25.

(D) Additional one year for \$30.

(E) Picture and sound settings are stored as one setting and can't be called up separately.

(F) Has simulated 'surround' sound effect using optional rear speakers.

(G) Can simulate stereo when broadcast is in mono.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

JARGON and marketing buzzwords can be a confusing trap for unwary consumers out to buy a new TV. Salespeople fire them at you like a Gatling gun and bright, inviting brochures make sermons out of them to preach the virtues of the latest technology. But do you really need to fork out the extra money for the latest widget or is it just a marketing gimmick? To help you make a little sense out of the marketing hype we've put together a short glossary of some of the more common terms you're likely to come across in the showroom.

■ **Trinitron:** This is a design of picture tube patented by Sony in 1968. Sony claims that Trinitron tubes, by virtue of their unique design, give a brighter, sharper and better focused picture than other tubes. They are also perfectly flat in the vertical plane, which Sony claims makes them less susceptible to problems with light reflections (see *Flatter, squarer tubes* below).

The **SONY** model we tested has a Trinitron picture tube and the findings of our viewing panel are discussed in the section on *Picture quality* in the main article.

■ **Flatter, squarer tube (FST):** As the name suggests, this refers to a picture tube which is designed to have a flatter face and squarer edges than the more traditional rounded screen. The main advantage of a flatter screen is an increase in the viewing angle. With a rounded picture tube, people sitting towards the side of the screen and viewing it from an angle may see a distorted image. A flatter tube lessens the distortion for viewers not sitting directly in front of the screen. Another advantage is that flatter screens give fewer problems with reflecting glare from lamps or light from windows back into the eyes of the viewer.

Currently no picture tube is perfectly flat, but some claiming to be flatter, squarer tubes are less flat and square than others. Even when a set has FST plastered across its brochures you should check out the screen yourself to see how flat it really is.

■ **SCART connector:** SCART is a European standard for interconnecting video equipment. It defines a standard plug and socket that can be used to connect together TVs, video recorders, satellite TV decoders, etc. Some televisions have a SCART socket but the system is not widely used in Australia, so if you don't have a particular need for one there's no advantage in having one. Some of the models we tested had SCART sockets but all of these, except the **SAMSUNG**, also provided alternative connec-

tors for AV line inputs and outputs. The **SAMSUNG** provided line outputs only through the SCART connector, which means you would need a special adaptor cable to connect it to your stereo system.

■ **Dark or tinted glass:** The glass that makes up the front of the picture tube can be tinted. This has the effect of increasing the perceived contrast in an image and making the picture appear a little crisper. It can also reduce light reflection and make viewing less fatiguing. Once again, check out the picture yourself. Merely the presence of tinted glass is no guarantee that the picture is going to be good.

■ **Multi-standard reception:** A television signal is a complex combination of information which includes signals that control the making of the picture as well as sound and various timing and synchronisation signals. The blueprint that defines the way this complex signal is put together is known as a television standard, and several different standards are used throughout the world. The most common are PAL (the one used in Australia), NTSC and SECAM. While the standards are not compatible with each other, some TVs can be switched to cope with any of them. All models tested offered some form of multi-standard reception.

The ability to receive broadcasts in different standards is not particularly useful unless you plan on taking your TV overseas with you, but it can come in handy if you also have a multi-standard video recorder. If you received a video tape made in America using their NTSC standard, for instance, you wouldn't need to have it converted to PAL. Another use would be if you had friends from, say, France come out for a holiday bringing their SECAM-standard camcorder with them. With a multi-standard TV you could plug in the camcorder directly and watch their holiday movies.

■ **S-Video:** Some video recorders, camcorders and laserdisc players are compatible with a standard called S-Video. When connected to a television which has an S-Video input, these products give better picture quality than can be achieved through the normal video connections. If you have a video source that has an S-Video connector, you'd benefit from a similarly equipped TV, but the market for these products in Australia is pretty limited and they're not very common. All the models tested had at least one S-Video connector.

	8	9	10	11	12	13	
AV line inputs	RF sensitivity score (%)	Sound score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)	
3	100	79	82	66	77	PHILIPS 29SX8671	
3	100	78	68	71	75	SONY KV-2966AS	
3	100	62	76	73	73	MITSUBISHI CT-29AB1	
3	100	66	68	71	72	PANASONIC TC-29V26A	equal
3	100	78	59	67	72	SAMSUNG CB-7230WT	
1	100	65	67	64	69	NEC FS-6850S	
3	100	59	57	75	68	SANYO CPP2930	
						NOT RECOMMENDED	
2	100	78	59	51	66	TELEFUNKEN SDX290 H	

1 Teletext

Teletext is a TV information service which is broadcast along with a channel's picture and sound. In Australia, the Seven television network is the only station that broadcasts a teletext service, called Austext. If your television has a special decoder you can call up on-screen the teletext information, which includes TAB data, international, national and sporting news, sharemarket quotes and other financial information, weather and more general information like recipes.

The **SAMSUNG** and **TELEFUNKEN** come with a teletext decoder built-in, and have control buttons on the remote. With the other models, teletext may be available as an option if you want it.

2 Full auto-tuning

With this feature all available TV stations can be tuned in with the press of a single button. The TV automatically sweeps through the bands, detecting and storing all available channels. The disadvantage of this is that stations are stored in consecutive memory positions as they're found, so channel nine, for instance, will not be stored on preset nine. However, you can manually tune the channels onto any preset you want.

3 Skip

This refers to the skipping of 'blank' channel presets when you press the channel up or down buttons. All TVs provide more presets (memories for storage of TV stations) than most users would need and models with a skip feature allow you to disable any unused presets so they don't appear when you're scanning through the channels. If, for instance, you have channel seven stored in preset seven and channel nine in preset nine, you can set the skip function on preset eight so that when you are on channel seven and press the channel up button you go directly to channel nine.

The **TELEFUNKEN** doesn't have dedicated channel up or down buttons on the remote control so a skip function is not necessary. You can skim through the channels by going through the menus but it's a tedious process.

4 Personal preference memories

This feature lets you store settings for

picture (colour, contrast, brightness, etc) and sound (tone, special effects, etc) in a memory that can be recalled later. The table lists the number of memories available for storing picture and sound settings.

5 External speaker connection

The purpose of external speaker connections is to allow you to replace the inbuilt speakers with better-quality hifi ones if you wish.

6 Stereo enhancement effect

Models with a tick in this column have a special sound setting which emphasises the stereo effect when receiving a stereo broadcast. It has the effect of making the speakers seem further apart than they are. Some models, indicated by a 'G' in this column, can give a simulated stereo effect from a mono broadcast. The **PHILIPS** and **NEC** can create a simulated 'surround' sound effect if a set of speakers is connected to the 'surround' speaker terminals and positioned at the rear of the room.

The value and usefulness of any of these special sound effects will be dependent on your personal taste and preferences.

7 Headphones

A headphone socket can be of great benefit if you have a hearing impairment. It also comes in handy if you want to watch TV late at night without disturbing anyone.

8 AV line inputs

This is the number of sets of audio and video line inputs on each model. Line inputs can be used to connect video recorders, camcorders, videodisc players, etc. The **NEC** has only one set of line inputs at the rear of the unit. This could be limiting if you had a video recorder and a camcorder as you'd need to keep swapping plugs around to go from one to the other.

All the models have at least one set of AV outputs, which allow the TV to be connected to a stereo system. On the **SAMSUNG** the line out was only available through a SCART socket (for an explanation of this see *What does it all mean?* opposite) so you'd need to buy a special adaptor cable if you wanted to connect it this way.

9 RF sensitivity score

This is a measure of how well the television picks up the radio frequency signals transmitted by TV stations and indicates how well the set will perform in fringe reception areas. All the models are excellent in this regard and none should have any problem picking up available channels even when the signal strength is a little weak.

10 Sound score

This is a measure of the sound quality of each model and is a combination of a subjective assessment of the sound produced by the television's internal amplifier and speakers, and technical measurements of the sound quality made from the audio line output, which you'd use if you wanted to connect the TV to your stereo system.

11 Ease of use score

The main component of this score is an assessment of the ease of use of the remote control, which was put through a series of standard tasks such as adjusting the volume, changing channels, adjusting the picture and sound settings, etc. Other areas looked at were the ease of tuning in the channels during the initial set-up and the quality and helpfulness of the instructions.

12 Picture quality score

Picture quality assessment was made up of two parts. The major component (around 70%) was the results from a viewing panel, where panellists rated the picture quality of each model when watching off-air broadcasts. The remaining part of the score came from an examination of a series of test patterns used to determine the quality in various areas of performance. None of the models had any particular problems with the test pattern assessments. The results of the viewing panel are discussed in the main story.

13 Overall score

The overall score comprised:

- RF sensitivity score: 10%
- Sound score: 30%
- Ease of use score: 25%
- Picture quality score: 35%



LETTERS

Send your letters to **CHOICE**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Where possible, please include your daytime telephone number, as we may wish to contact you direct for more information or to discuss your comments and queries.

GREENPEACE ANSWERS NORWAY

In his letter to **CHOICE** in March, His Excellency Mr Nils Bølset, ambassador to Australia for Norway, cites the need for "international co-operation and agreement on environmental and developmental issues". It is the contravention of this very principle of agreement that led Greenpeace to call for an international boycott of Norwegian products.

In 1985 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) declared North Atlantic minke whales a 'protected stock' because of scientific evidence showing that 50 years of Norwegian hunting had depleted this stock to below 54% of its original.

In 1992 Norway decided to step outside the international community and agreements made within the IWC and resumed commercial whaling of North Atlantic minke whales. This sends a very obvious message to other nations — if you want whales just go and take them.

The total disregard of an international environmental agreement on the part of Norway is the reason Greenpeace has taken this much considered and radical action of an international boycott of Norwegian products.

R Kelman

Whale campaigner, Greenpeace Australia

PACKAGING A PERSONAL PRODUCT

Regarding your concern over Saturn condoms and their alleged overpackaging (*Green Page*, February 1994), we are continually looking at ways of improving our product. However, due to the personal nature of this product and the ramifications of shelf tampering at a retail level, we believe the overriding factor for our customers is a protective cover for the condom.

Our market research has identified two main points of consumer concern: malicious damage and theft. Due to the high traffic volume of consumers in retail outlets and the increased awareness of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, condom sales have increased dramatically. Gone are the days when they were sold under the shop counter!

Based on this, our emphasis has been safety — which is why we offer condoms in a recycled plastic box which protects them from malicious damage. The case also protects the condoms from heat and exposure to the elements and can be carried around in a discreet manner.

Apart from the plastic box, the packaging is needed for



instructions and for presentation requirements as authorised by the Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia. Like other condoms, we do not have a booklet but use the packaging instead.

The plastic blister holds the pack together, prevents the seal being broken and pilfering. Most condom packaging can be opened and the condoms removed without it being apparent to the purchaser.

We are proud to say we have never had a complaint from any of our customers stating that the product has been successfully interfered with, and in certain instances we have been commended for our packaging.

G Newhouse

Principal, Access Sales and Marketing
Cannington, WA

CONSUMERS AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

While listening to a program on the ABC — *Background Briefing* — on the employment of children throughout the world on consumer items, I felt motivated to write to the Minister for Consumer Affairs and you in an effort to ameliorate this, especially now that 1994 has been designated the Year of the Family.

We as consumers surely have some power in this insidious trade in humanity. It was horrifying to hear of the exploitation of children just to produce cheap goods. The goods may be cheap but human beings are paying with their lives.

A program of education could perhaps be undertaken by all consumer groups from federal level downwards to bring to the general public's attention what is happening worldwide.

Do we really feel comfortable wearing shoes made by children who work in indescribable conditions for anything up to 12 hours a day for a mere pittance and at the expense of their health and education?

Would it be possible to emulate the USA, which is endeavouring to bring in legislation that imports have to be endorsed that they are not produced by child labour, otherwise they are excluded? I am sure Australians would not mind paying a little extra or even boycotting these goods if they were made aware of the conditions under which these children are employed.

Perhaps you would be good enough to give some thought to this matter and advise what, if anything, can be done, if only by consumer groups at grass roots level.

F Rolls

Secretary, Gold Coast Consumers' Association, Qld

As we mentioned in a *Choice Cut* of August 1993, when it comes to avoiding products made by children, the bottom line is the country of origin. The highest chance of exploitation is in countries without good labour laws, for instance without minimum age laws or minimum wages. According to an expert on ethical investment we spoke to at the time, these are South American countries, Thailand and, to a lesser extent, India and China. We recommend writing to companies, telling them of your concerns. Our *Choice Cut* included suggested wording.

CONTROLLING THE HOT AIR

A fan heater with a thermostat can be great at keeping your room comfortable — but only if the thermostat works as it is supposed to. Otherwise, you might as well buy a heater without one and save yourself a few bucks.

IF YOU'VE EVER had a heater without a thermostat, you'll know you have to keep turning it on and off to keep the temperature comfortable. You might have wished you'd paid the extra money for one with a thermostat. We tested the cheapest fan heaters (less than \$100) that do have a thermostat, and found only a few are designed well enough to keep you comfortable; the others aren't worth the extra money.

Theoretically, heaters with thermostats are better than those without for several reasons:

- They can save you money in the long term by only heating the room to the temperature you want.
- They are more convenient because they switch themselves on and off.
- They won't overheat a room if accidentally left on.

As you pay extra for the thermostat, checking whether they work well was the major part of our test. The other aspects we took into account were how easy they are to use, how noisy they are and how hot the front grille gets.

MAKING YOURSELF COMFORTABLE

The heaters we tested are small floor-standing models — some can be wall-mounted too — that will heat a smallish-sized room. They all deliver only about 2.2 kW of heat on 'high' and 1.1 kW on 'low', so if the room is too large (or if doors are left open), the heater will not be able to warm the whole area and will run flat out just to heat the area near it. If you want to heat a large or open room, a small fan heater like these is the wrong choice; you need a more powerful heater or perhaps a reverse-cycle air conditioner.

As the thermostat cycles on and off, a person sitting in the room will feel the temperature rising and falling. We measured how much the temperature varied between on and off at each of four spots near the heater — the less the variation the more comfortable you'll be. This forms the basis of our 'thermostat score' in the table. Your comfort will also depend on the temperature of the day, what



The KAMBROOK TH35 (left) although a poor performer overall, topped our ease of use assessment. The GOLDAIR 3112's controls were hard to get at and poorly labelled.

you're wearing, the room you use the heater in and, of course, individual preferences.

Air flow is also a factor. A fan in a heater can be too strong, and someone sitting in front of it can actually feel cooler rather than warmer. On the other hand, if a fan is not strong enough, only the area very close to the heater will be warmed.

When fan heaters with thermostats first came onto the market, they were designed so the fan would switch off as well as the element when the room got warm enough. However, the heater itself remained quite warm, so the thermostat wasn't able to sense the room temperature

very well. The next generation of heaters kept the fan blowing all the time, so that air was being forced through the heater and the thermostat stayed more in touch with the temperature of the room. The drawback with this design was that a person sitting in front of the heater could actually feel cooler when the elements turned off because they had a fan blowing on them. Some manufacturers have now designed the heaters to switch down to half heat instead of turning the element and fan off when the room reaches the desired temperature; we found it is models like this that seem to ensure a smaller temperature difference between 'on' and 'off'.

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre evaluated the controls of the heaters and considered the **HOMEMAKER** and the **SUNGLO Thermalair** to be best for people with disabilities. These two models have controls that are easy to operate and interpret and a good pilot light situated on top. However, the **Thermalair**'s flap over the controls needs to be left up or removed to get the benefit of the pilot light and easy access to the controls.

Fan heaters

Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Price paid (\$)*	Warranty (years)	Type
SUNGLO Laser 2400	Valuca	China	40	1 (A)	Floor standing
HOMEMAKER 2400	K Mart	Australia	60	1 (A)	Floor standing or wall mount
SUNGLO Vector 2400	Valuca	China	40	1 (A)	Floor standing or wall mount
VULCAN Hot Fashion 0731	Vulcan	New Zealand	94	2 (B)	Floor standing or wall mount
SUNGLO Thermalaire 2400	Valuca	Australia	54	1 (A)	Floor standing or wall mount
GLENAIR GL85	Dimplex	Hong Kong	80	1 (A)	Floor standing

Thermostat score lower than 25%

GOLDAIR 3126	Thebe International	New Zealand	50	1 (A)	Floor standing
KAMBROOK TH26	Kambrook	Australia	49	1 (B)	Floor standing
GOLDAIR 3215	Thebe International	New Zealand	73	1 (A)	Floor standing
GOLDAIR 3216	Thebe International	New Zealand	66	1 (A)	Floor standing
KAMBROOK TH35	Kambrook	China	80	1 (A)	Floor standing
GOLDAIR 3253	Thebe International	China	77	1 (A)	Floor standing or wall mount
GOLDAIR 3112	Thebe International	New Zealand	40	1 (A)	Floor standing

1 'Eco' setting	2 Swivel adjust	3 Tilt adjust
		✓
✓		✓
	✓	✓
		✓

* Prices shown are those we paid; not all heaters were available to price in the shops when this article was being prepared. (A) Parts and labour or replacement. (B) Parts and labour.

SAFETY

Any kind of heater can be a hazard, and some manufacturers have designed features that improve their safety. We dropped a cotton towel over the heaters in this test to see how they would respond. The GOLDAIR 3253, 3215 and 3216 switch themselves off and also have a loud alarm that sounds when the air inlets are blocked.

Other models — the three SUNGLOs and the HOMEMAKER — have a resettable thermal fuse which turns the heater off if the air inlet is covered. To reset them (and the GOLDAIRs), you have to unplug them, wait till they've cooled down, and then plug them in again. Although this sounds inconvenient, it is actually a good safety feature, and the situation shouldn't arise very often.

The other models just turn off because they get hot and the thermostat switches the heater off, but when they cool down they'll switch on again. There is the danger that if the heaters were left to just cycle on and off like this, the towel might get drier and drier and eventually catch fire.

Three of the heaters — the SUNGLO Thermalaire, VULCAN and the HOMEMAKER — glowed red and singed the cotton towel before they turned off. If the item dropped on those heaters had been something more flammable, like a synthetic-fabric dressing gown, it might have gone up in flames.

WHAT TO BUY

SUNGLO Laser 2400	\$40
HOMEMAKER 2400	\$60

Prices shown are those we paid.



4	5	6	7	8	
Noise score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Grille temperature score (%)	Thermostat score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
67	60	95	85	80	SUNGLO Laser 2400
70	60	53	82	74	HOMEMAHER 2400
47	60	89	63	62	SUNGLO Vector 2400
77	60	63	53	60	VULCAN Hot Fashion 0731
70	50	63	49	55	SUNGLO Thermalwave 2400
63	55	95	40	52	GLENAIR GL85
70	55	95	18	40	GOLDAIR 3126
50	55	58	20	33	KAMBRICK TH26
80	60	84	0	30	GOLDAIR 3215
77	60	58	4	30	GOLDAIR 3216
63	70	95	0	29	KAMBRICK TH35
77	65	53	0	27	GOLDAIR 3253
77	40	37	0	23	GOLDAIR 3112

SUNGLO Laser 2400

Price paid: \$40

Best thermostat score — the smallest temperature difference between the heater switching on and off, you stay more comfortable.

Being an upright model, it is more likely to tip over than one of the horizontal models.

Markings of the controls are not clear.

No tilt adjustment.

Cannot be wall-mounted.

HOMEMAHER 2400

Price paid: \$60

Good thermostat score.

Very good tilt adjustment.

Being metal, the grille gets quite hot.

Good markings on the controls, but the controls themselves are only fair.

SUNGLO Vector 2400

Price paid: \$40

Thermostat control is very hard to operate.

Being an upright model, it is more likely to tip over than one of the horizontal models.

VULCAN Hot Fashion 0731

Price paid: \$94

Has an unnecessary flap over the controls.

Which hides the light that indicates when the heater is operating.

SUNGLO Thermalwave 2400

Price paid: \$54

The flap over the controls is inconvenient and

hides the pilot light in daylight, but you can see the light at night through the flap.

GLENAIR GL85

Price paid: \$80

It can be very easily swivelled sideways or

tilted onto 'oscillate'.

The markings for the controls are generally good, but there is not enough clearance around controls.

Cannot be wall-mounted.

Similar models

■ The GOLDAIR 3252 is same as the GOLDAIR 3253 tested, except that it does not have a floor stand/wall bracket or an alarm.

■ The SUNGLO Thermalwave is identical to the HOMEMAHER 2400 tested.

■ The VULCAN Hot Fashion 0730 is similar to the VULCAN Hot Fashion 0731 tested, but doesn't have an 'ECO' setting or splash cover.

■ The GLENAIR GL80 is the same as the GLENAIR GL85 tested, but the GL80 doesn't oscillate.

1 'ECO' setting

On the 'ECO' setting, the heat provided is about one quarter of that on 'high', and the fan speed is a lot slower and particularly quiet. It won't keep you warm in most rooms, but could toast your toes discreetly under a desk.

2 Swivel adjustment

A swivel feature means you can adjust which way the heater is pointing, which with heaters like these that are so easy just to move to point towards you is a less useful feature than it would be on bigger models. However, you can also set the heaters with ticks in this column to automatically swivel back and forth, or 'oscillate', helping the distribution of warm air.

3 Tilt adjustment

This means you can tilt the heater up or down so hot air isn't being blown straight out in front. Some can be adjusted more than others, so if this matters to you, check the heaters in the shops.

4 Noise level and score

We measured the noise level in a room with carpets, curtains and furniture, and scored the results using the same scale we use for air conditioners' noise levels because you'd use a

fan heater in the same types of situation as an air conditioner. The noise from the heaters would be noticeable, but only the KAMBRICK TH26 and the SUNGLO Vector would be more than a very low background noise.

5 Ease of use score

This was based on an assessment of the controls of the heaters. While the controls all do what they're supposed to do, some are certainly more intuitive and/or easier to use than others. There is certainly room for improvement here. See the profiles and the photo on page 43 for details.

6 Grille temperature score

The grille of a heater gets very hot and may give nasty burns. All the heaters satisfied the Australian Standard requirements, which allow the grille temperature to reach 250°C, with some heaters managing to perform well without having very high grille temperatures. The models with plastic grilles have lower grille temperatures than those with metal grilles, which might be a consideration if you have crawling children.

7 Thermostat score

This is a measure of the temperature difference you will feel as the thermostat cycles the heater on and off. A high score means you'll feel more comfortable because the difference between the coolest and hottest part of the thermostat cycle is small.

8 Overall score

The four performance characteristics were rated as follows to reach an overall score:

- Thermostat score: 60%
- Noise score: 20%
- Ease of use score: 10%
- Grille temperature score: 10%



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

- 1** A classic migraine is easy to recognise because it is preceded by a visual disturbance (aura) which may consist of little specks in front of the eyes, blurred eyesight or a pattern of zigzags that moves slowly across the field of vision for 20 or 30 minutes.
True or false?

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

CLASSIC
MIGRAINE
SUFFERER

ORDINARY
MIGRAINE
SUFFERER



- 2** Computerised axial tomography is a technique used to obtain an image of any part of the body and is derived by applying an external magnetic field that orients hydrogen ions (contained in water) in the direction of the field.
True or false?

- 3** Ordinary shareholders have a claim to a company's profits, dividends and assets ahead of other investors should the company be wound up or liquidated.
True or false?

- 4** Biological washing powders which contain enzymes to help break down stains will only be effective in very hot water.
True or false?

COMPLETELY FERAL
BIOLOGICAL WASHING POWDER
DIGESTING A SMALL SHIRT



- 5** The old folk remedy "feed a cold and starve a fever" is medically sound. Food should be withheld from children with high temperatures until the fever passes.
True or false?

- 6** To maximise concentration levels and prevent fatigue, it is important to keep the amount of sugar in the blood at a constant level throughout the day, which means eating small amounts of high-carbohydrate foods at regular intervals.
True or false?

- 7** Two eating habits that could undermine your efforts to have a diet high in iron are drinking tea with meals and having high quantities of unprocessed bran in your diet.
True or false?

- 8** Developed countries have 25% of the world's population but they use up to 80% of its natural resources and produce 75% of its waste.
True or false?



ANSWERS

1. True. As this aura subsides, aching starts in the front or back of the head, usually on one side only, and becomes progressively more severe. The victim feels sick and may vomit, and light hurts their eyes.

2. False. Computerised axial tomography (CAT or CT scanning) relies on a narrow beam of X-rays that traverses the body in a series of steps. Two aligned detector units follow the X-ray beam across the body, sensing the transmitted X-rays. A reading for each position is recorded, calculated by a computer and printed out or displayed as a picture. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) involves the use of an external magnetic field to obtain images of parts of the body, including the brain.

3. False. 'Preference shareholders' — those who buy shares categorised as preferential — rank ahead of ordinary shareholders in terms of their claim over profits, dividends and assets.

4. False. In fact, because enzymes are inactivated at high temperatures, biological washing powders are not effective in very hot water.

5. False. There are many reasons why children should be fed during a fever. The increased heat also increases caloric requirements because calories are being consumed rapidly at the higher body temperature. More important, there is an increased demand for fluid. Liquid should never be withheld from a feverish child or he/she could become dehydrated.

6. True. This pattern of eating is known as grazing. Unfortunately the dietary habits of many people would be more accurately described as famine and feast: skipping breakfast and sometimes lunch and then consuming large amounts of food in the evening. This means blood sugar levels and concentration levels become low during the day when it is most important to be able to concentrate.

7. True. Tea inhibits iron absorption. The tannic acid in tea binds iron, causing it to pass straight through our bodies. Likewise, excessive bran can also stop iron absorption due to its high phytic acid content, which binds iron.

8. True.



CHOICE

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If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know.

Kraft has recalled SLICED TASTY COON CHEESE because some 250 g and 500 g packs may contain white plastic fragments. These fragments in most cases should be clearly visible, and should not pose a health problem. The products can be identified as follows:

250 g - use by: 15 Sept 94 S, 15 Sept 94 X, 15 Sept 94 T, 15 Sept 94 L

500 g - use by: 15 Sept 94 Z, 15 Sept 94 U, 15 Sept 94 M, 15 Sept 94 T, 15 Sept 94 N.

Return the product to the place of purchase for a full refund. Any further enquiries can be directed to Kraft consumer relations department on 008 034 021.

Philip Morris has recalled all BRASS CIGARETTE LIGHTERS sold with PETER JACKSON cigarettes between February and April 1994. Lighters were sold in a clear sleeve with two packets of Peter Jackson 30s cigarettes, as part of the 10-year Anniversary Brass Lighter Offer. A small number may fail to extinguish properly when closed. Return lighter to a Peter Jackson stockist. Any queries may be directed to the Quality Assurance Department on 008 810 433.

Bonaire has recalled BONAIRE 40 cm WALL-MOUNTED FAN, model no. 0330008, sold since August 1993. Some fans are not fitted with an internal earth wire to the rear mounting panel as required by Australian electrical authorities (the product has approval number NI3254). This can be identified by disconnecting the fan from the power supply and removing the fan from the wall-mounting bracket. The back panel of the fan can be checked for the earth screw connection. This is positioned on either the right or the left-hand side of the centre blade holding screw. If the earth screw connection is not there, the product requires modification. Modified products have been clearly identified by a small round black sticker on the base of the fan's rear mounting panel next to the on/off pull cord switch. Cartons have also been identified with a black sticker being positioned under the part number on the carton. Return the fan to the nearest Bonaire Pyrox service branch or service agent.

Harper Collins Publishers has recalled the book *Making Wine At Home* by Gloria Oxford, published under the Bay Books imprint. Page 46 incorrectly states that 400 grams of copper sulphate should be added to water to make a solution which is then added to wine. The amount should be 400 milligrams. Consumption of wine made in accordance with the printed instructions may have serious health consequences. Return copies of the book to the store where it was purchased or send it to Harper Collins Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd, 25 Ryde Road, Pymble 2073; phone (02) 952 5000. (Also see the *Choice Cut* on page 5.)

FOUR-YEAR INDEX

JULY 1990 — JUNE 1994

(T) Test
(D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities
(U) Update of previous report
* Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, or letters

MAJOR APPLIANCE SUMMARY

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(D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities

(U) Update of previous report

* Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters

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